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The Englishwoman in India

“What would India be without England, and what would the British Empire be without Englishwomen? To these women are due the gratitude not only of their country but of the civilised world. Fearlessly the woman of British birth looks into the eye of danger. Faithfully and with willing sacrifice she upholds the standard of the King-Emperor—the standard of culture and of service to humanity.”—COUNT VON KONIGSMARK, ‘Die Engländer in Indien.’

The Englishwoman in India

BY

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'CAPTAIN DESMOND, V.C.' AND 'THE GREAT AMULET'

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ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

TO THE UNNUMBERED WOMEN,
OF ALL CASTES AND CREEDS,
WHO HAVE LIVED AND LOVED
AND WORKED IN INDIA,

I Dedicate this Book.

*' O human heart !
Neither lost nor ignorant—living at first hand from
thy source,
I perceive that thy home and mine are the same—one
house, though the doors be different.
Not here or there : not here, O friend, in the centre
of the world, and there outcast and forlorn—
But ever at home—to thee greetings, and congratula-
tions, and love wafted over the water,
I send."*

—ED. CARPENTER.

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M. DIVER.

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THE ENGLISHWOMAN IN INDIA

CHAPTER I.

MAID.

“Far and far our homes are set, round the Seven Seas ;
Woe for us if we forget ; we that hold by these !
Unto each his mother-beach, bloom and bird and land—
Masters of the Seven Seas, oh love and understand ! ”

—KIPLING.

OF late years we have heard a good deal, one way and another, of that mysterious product—the Anglo-Indian woman. Kipling has sketched her for us with inimitable skill and truth ; the growing army of Anglo-Indian novelists diligently enlighten us on the subject ; and, in these days of rapid flitting to and fro, she herself is very frequently in our midst,—yet few, curiously few of us, on this side of

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the ocean, have any real knowledge of her life, and thoughts, and ways; of the charm, the mystery, the high lights, and sharp black shadows that make up the sum of our sister-women's lives in India.

It is doubtful, certainly, whether a world of books would avail to give the average Englishwoman any adequate idea of a daily round of duties and difficulties so unlike her own. For no pen—not even the magic pen of a Kipling or a Mrs Steele—can convey to a mind unacquainted with the East the subtle atmosphere of India, the awful lifelessness of her vast dun-coloured Plains, the smells and sounds of her swarming cities, the majesty of her incomparable mountains, and the mystery that hangs over the lives and thoughts of her many peoples; and since environment is one of the strongest and subtlest forces that make for character-

development, it is unfair to pass judgment upon any man or woman without giving due weight to this great factor in their lives.

That Englishwomen are disposed to pass judgment on their Anglo-Indian sisters, as a class, is undeniable. From pedestals of sober respectability and energetic industry, they denounce as idle, frivolous, and luxury-loving, those other women of whose trials and temptations they know little or nothing; and it must be acknowledged that a surface glance at certain aspects of Anglo-Indian life would appear to justify much of the unsparing criticism to which they are subjected. But a deeper knowledge of what life in India really means would soften those criticisms to a surprising extent. *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*—but since full com-

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prehension is, in this case, scarcely possible, it would be well for those at home to realise, as vividly as may be, the special dangers and difficulties which complicate the lives of Englishwomen in India.

Seton Merriman, with characteristic insight, has said : " There are moral microbes in every country ; and it is not fair to judge one land by the laws of another. There is the fatalism of India, the restlessness of New York, the fear of the Arctic, and the irritability of Africa."

Yes, those who live for any length of time in India have to reckon with that insidious tendency to fatalism—to accept men and things as they find them, without enthusiasm, and without criticism—which lurks in the very air they breathe. The large tolerance, bred of intimate contact with many-sided aspects of life, slips,

all too easily, into a certain laxity—mental, moral, and physical — which is in itself accountable for much that appears incomprehensible to those who have never felt its subtle influence, its compelling power.

The Anglo - Indian woman cannot—in a social sense—live unto herself alone. Whether she will or no, her life is blended inextricably with those about her. Be her mental and moral landmarks—on arrival—never so definitely laid down, be her prejudices and her insular aloofness never so deeply ingrained, yet slowly—imperceptibly almost—she will find her outlook on life widened, her heart softened, her nervous system more or less undermined; in a word, she will be called upon to face life's problems and perplexities under conditions wholly different to those under which she faced them "at Home." Mind

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and body undergo a mysterious readjustment. She is converted once for all into an Anglo-Indian woman, and any criticism of her conduct or character which overlooks these altered conditions cannot but be partial, false, unjust.

Above all, it is unfair to overlook the physical disabilities under which she labours; more especially if she has spent the first years of her life in India, returning so soon as her education was complete; a life programme common to more than half the Anglo-Indian wives of the present generation. It is a known fact that the Indian climate, the artificial life its hot season entails, the long railway journeys, and the continuous shifting from place to place, from which few Anglo-Indians are exempt, tends to promote an astonishingly rapid waste of nerve tissue; and it is this

fact which renders long residence in India more injurious, as a rule, to women than to men. It is this same waste of nerve force which lies at the root of much of the restlessness and irritability, in certain temperaments, and, in others, that curious slackness—mental and moral—of which the Anglo-Indian woman stands accused. In mere muscular vigour and energy she is in no way behind her English sisters. The majority of her amusements take the form of exercise ; and the danger is rather, in such a climate, that she is apt to fatigue her muscles at the expense of her nerves. Hence many of the ills that her overwrought flesh is heir to. The continued strain of social pressure to which those women are subjected who, year after year, pass their days between Simla and Calcutta, is enough to account for almost

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anything in the way of moral or physical collapse. It will, at least, be admitted that they are handicapped by circumstances to a degree which surely entitles them to judgment well seasoned with mercy; the more so since we are all aware to what a humiliating extent the soul's strength, and the mind's also, is dependent on the body's health and vigour.

Yet, despite this serious disability, despite the social atmosphere in which she is bound to live and move and have her being, despite the slender intellectual stimulus her daily round affords, and the moral danger that lurks beneath too large a tolerance of men and things, the fact remains that India's heroines and martyrs far outnumber her social sinners; and it is a fact of which English men and women may justly feel proud.

Having considered the effect of the climate upon the mind and body of our Anglo-Indian sister, a short survey of her daily life, from girlhood onwards, may prove yet more helpful towards a fuller understanding of much that is puzzling, and even distasteful, to English minds.

It has already been said that more than half the Englishwomen in India to-day have spent their girlhood and early childhood in the country itself, which, in most cases, means that they have been sent "Home" at the age of seven or thereabouts, returning at seventeen to face the chief business of their lives—a round of social functions and amusements. Passing over those first vivid years of childhood, and the effects wrought upon their plastic minds by intimacy with a host of

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adoring native servants, it will be well to glance briefly at a few of the distinctive features of Anglo-Indian girlhood as compared with those of the average English girl of the same age and social standing.

Take, for example, a case of two girl friends,—one the daughter of a Colonel, or a Commissioner of some station in Northern India; one the daughter of a well-to-do doctor in a large country town in England,—and note what contrasted fates await them when their education is, so to speak, “finished.”

The English girl will have her “coming-out” ball—a ponderous affair, whereat men are far from plentiful, and an inexperienced girl may be thankful to secure partners at all, without much regard to their age or attainments. She will be admitted to the

privilege of paying "calls," will play a certain amount of tennis in the summer, dine out on rare and solemn occasions, and dance some half a dozen times a-year. These mild delights will, in all probability, make up the sum total of her social life. In a garrison town she may dance oftener and with more congenial partners; she may multiply tennis- and croquet-parties. But at best her social pleasures are rarely more than a side issue in her life; and, if she be a girl of intelligence and resource, she will in time find her main interest in one of three spheres,—the intellectual, the domestic, or the religious,—and so learn to come at happiness through the channel of utility. Her intercourse with men of her own age and standing is, as a rule, comparatively rare; and her attitude to-

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wards them tends to become either wholly indifferent, frankly independent, or over-zealous to attract and please.

The London girl, with her wider social knowledge and her yearly experience of large house-parties, does not come within the pale of the present argument. It is the daughters of service and professional men whose English and Indian lives are under comparison. The English girl's atmosphere, then, is essentially domestic, probably religious, possibly intellectual, with a sprinkling of mild social interests to flavour the whole.

And what of the life that lies before that other girl when she rejoins her parents in India?

From the day she sets foot on the outward-bound steamer, she finds herself in a freer, lighter, lazier world than she

has ever dreamed of. All that seems to be required of her is to pass her time as pleasantly as possible ; not a difficult achievement, one may be sure, amid surroundings wholly new and interesting. In three weeks she will have come into friendly contact with more varied types of men and women than her home-staying friend will be likely to run across in twice as many months ; and, if she be possessed of any natural aptitude, she may acquire a fair preliminary knowledge of Anglo-Indian ways and manners before she sets foot on Indian soil.

Arrived at her destined station, she "comes out" in good earnest. A ceaseless flow of "callers" and "calling" makes havoc of her mornings ; tennis, riding, and garden-parties claim her afternoons ; and dances and dinners reduce to a minimum

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her few invaluable hours of rest. It is no rare thing for a girl to go to twelve or fourteen dances in a single season—dances whereat partners are young, eager, and plentiful,—dances rendered doubly delightful by the all-pervading air of genial informality which appeals, with peculiar keenness, to young minds and hearts newly released from the restraint of schoolroom life. Save for arranging a wealth of cut flowers, laid to her hand by the faithful *māli*, an Anglo-Indian girl's domestic duties are practically *nil*. Intellectual pastimes, in the form of lectures, concerts, or pictures, are not within her reach, and religious work is left to those who have given up their lives to it. All things conspire to develop the emotional, pleasure-loving side of her nature, to blur her girlish

visions of higher aims and sterner self-discipline.

Small wonder, then, if she is borne along upon this strange, swift stream of life, unthinking, unresisting; absorbed, for the most part, in mere enjoyment of the good things set before her; taking her fill of pleasure, laughter, and love; for hearts are strangely inflammable under Indian skies, and propinquity fans the faintest spark into a flame. Small wonder that lightly-dipped natures grow frivolous in such an atmosphere; that even the more seriously inclined succumb for a while to the irresistible charm, the lightness, and brightness, and irresponsibility of Anglo-Indian social life.

If it should seem to any that undue stress has been laid upon these early years, let each one look back to those

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vivid days when the woman in her awakened, and judge whether their effect upon her after life and character has been a slight thing,—a breath that passes and leaves no mark.

It follows, then, that if we would make an honest effort towards a more sympathetic understanding of the Anglo-Indian woman and her ways, we shall do well, in the first place, to consider under what condition, and in what environment, her transition time was passed, and we shall do still better to remember, throughout, that she is no peculiar product with whom we have little in common, but a daughter of England, even as we are.

And what Englishwoman shall say that, in like circumstances, she herself would have been a better wife or

mother—nay, that she would even have remained as brave, loyal, and charming as her travel-worn sisters, whom she is all too ready to criticise and condemn?

CHAPTER II.

WIFE.

“Jack’s own Jill goes up the hill,
To Murree or Chakrata ;
Jack remains, and dies in the plains,
And Jill re-marries soon after.”

IN the above quaint version of the old nursery jingle did Rudyard Kipling record his earliest impressions of married life in India ; a life hedged about with dangers, difficulties, and hardships rarely dreamed of in our placid English homes.

If Jill’s conduct is not always as exemplary as it might be, it is certain that her life and surroundings are not always of the most elevating description. Nor is she invariably as light-minded as Mr

Kipling here depicts her. His clever little verse presents one side of the picture only. That there is another and brighter side to it he himself would be the last to deny! Jill is not always wafted hillward by the first whiff of hot air from the dread furnace to come. She does, on occasion, stand by her husband, through bitter and sweet, through fire and frost; and what such a standard of wifeness costs the brave women who live up to it, only the wives of India know. For these unrecorded heroines are a nation without a history. At all events, their history—and a noble one it is—rarely supplies effective material for fiction, and in consequence their existence has almost come to be doubted on this side of the ocean.

Mr Kipling's Jill is the type of Anglo-

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Indian wife best known to English readers; and yet how much less than little do they know of the subtle temptations which beset her at every turn! So serious are the charges made against India's morals—and the morals of her wives in particular—that it is impossible to present any adequate picture of Anglo-Indian married life without touching upon this difficult question. But, in common justice to our sister-women overseas, it is only fair to say all that can be said in palliation of a state of things which cannot, unhappily, be denied point-blank.

In the first place, the random assertion that the tone of social morality is lower in India than in England, is unjust and untrue. It is a fact that women of the upper middle class—wives of service and

professional men—are more strictly encompassed by “the conventions” than Anglo-Indian women of the same standing. Yet it does not follow that the sheltered wives of England are justified in assuming the *rôle* of Pharisee. They will do better to consider, instead, whether the saving grace of circumstances may not be, in part, responsible for their own integrity. Circumstance is, after all, the supreme test of character, and India tests a woman’s character to the uttermost. For, with all its surface laughter and lightness, Indian life is real, and you live it desperately from start to finish.

Of the social atmosphere enough has been said. In a Hill station—more especially in Simla—it is irresistibly infectious. But the grass widow in the Hills has pitfalls more definite to contend with; and

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perhaps the two most insidious are amateur theatricals and the military man on leave. It is hardly too much to say that one or other of these dominant factors in Hill station life is accountable for half the domestic tragedies of India. The proverbial relation between Satan and idle hands is too often confirmed in the Himalayas; and for a woman who is young, comely, and gifted with a taste for acting, Simla is assuredly not the most innocuous place on God's earth. Here frivolity reaches its highest height, and social pleasures are, to all appearance, the end and aim of every one's existence. Yet here, in the midst of this throng of busy idlers, the great task of governing the Empire must go forward, come what may.

A correspondent, writing from the great

Hill capital, makes special mention of this anomaly. "Simla," he writes, "would be a far more favourable seat for Government, and energies and faculties would find fuller development there, if the social current were far less strong; and those leaders of society would be public benefactors who could find some means of stemming it. No doubt the greater part of the pleasure-seeking and holiday-making is done by the ladies, but a very large share in it is visibly taken by the men; and we are disposed to believe that the extreme backwardness of Anglo-Indian society in recognising the modern advance in the intellectual and social position of women is due to the frivolity of the overwhelming majority of Anglo-Indian women, who are not only devotees of fashion themselves, but do their

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utmost to divert the energies of the men from work (which they cannot share) to pleasure and frivolity likewise."

A grave charge this—the graver since it comes from an Anglo-Indian, not from an English, pen. That the "Simla woman" (by which is meant not all women in Simla, but the typical devotee of Simla society) is frivolous, and free and easy both in mind and manners, is a truth which her most ardent admirer could not deny. One plea, at least, may be put forward in her defence—namely, that if former generations of her type helped to make Simla what it is, the tables have now been turned, and it is Simla which makes—or rather mars—the woman of to-day. Moreover, in a country where men and women are constantly thrown together under conditions which

tend to minimise formalism and conventional restraint, where leave is plentiful and grass widows—willing and unwilling—abound, it is scarcely surprising that the complications and conflicting duties of married life should prove appreciably greater than they are elsewhere.

One last word remains to be said for Jill before taking leave of her altogether. When society sits in judgment on her and her kind, it is prone to overlook the possible share her husband may have had in making her what she is. If a man be careless of his wife's reputation, if he fail to warn her of dangers to which he alone can open her eyes, if—through indolence, indifference, or a mistaken notion of unselfishness—he leaves her too entirely to her own devices, leaves her to walk blindfold upon diffi-

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cult ground, he has only himself to thank if his carelessness recoils upon his own head. It is not to be presumed that every case of the kind can be thus accounted for; but it is only just, while condemning the foolishness and frivolity of the wife, to make some allowance for possible indifference or unwisdom on the part of the husband.

And so, enough of Jill—a woman not without charm, whatever her faults and follies; and who are we, after all, that we should cast the first stone at her?

The Anglo-Indian wife who elects to stand fast at her post, come what may, lives in another world altogether. If Fate cast her lot in the North, she is called upon, year after year, to face that pitiless destroyer of youth and beauty—the Pun-

jab hot weather. She learns to know all the horror hidden in that dread word—cholera. She grows intimate with the malicious music of the mosquito, with the habits of crows, squirrels, wasps, and punkah-coolies—a unique revelation this last. She is initiated into the agonies of hot weather house-keeping, and grows skilful, through bitter experience, in grasping the fleeting moment between toughness and putrefaction, when the joint may possibly prove eatable. She learns to sleep in full noonday, and drive abroad at midnight in search of a few whiffs of lukewarm air. At sundown, when her long daily imprisonment is ended, she plays “hot - weather Badminton” in the club garden, or reads the “Home” papers in company with five or six other patient, weary women, under the jerky little out-

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side punkah that so grimly resembles a gallows-tree.

Such is her monotonous round of life from May to October—five red-hot, interminable months; unless, indeed, her husband secures two months' leave, and then . . . What pen can depict the rapture of that hillward journey—that magic transit from the parched, chess-board landscape of the plains to the drenched green glory of the mountains? Only the woman who has dared to brave the merciless furnace of June and July tastes to the full the ecstasy of that wondrous ascent to moisture, coolness—life—a very foretaste of resurrection! And thus she, too, reaps her reward.

But although the wives of India may be roughly divided into the two types already named, these by no means ex-

haust the list. Nothing has yet been said of the way of life peculiar to those little lonely stations, where five or six English folk—with, perhaps, nothing save their colour in common—are thrown wholly upon one another's society day after day, and month after month; a life wherein social temptations are few, but one that creates temptations peculiar to itself, a fact strikingly illustrated in one of Kipling's cleverest Indian stories. Yet it is possible, even in such unpromising surroundings, for the nest-loving Englishwoman to make herself a home, and an attractive one to boot, provided that she be blessed with a happy marriage, and a cheerful and resourceful mind.

The delights and difficulties of "camping" should by no means be overlooked, since the civilian's wife—more especially

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in the higher grades—is fated to spend a large portion of the year under canvas. In one marked respect, also, camp life differs from all other modes of existence in India. Here, at least, the woman has no social element to reckon with; here her atmosphere is wholesomely and monotonously domestic, and she is dependent for amusement upon physical exercise, change of scene, and her own mental resources. For a woman who rides well, and possesses an absorbing hobby of any kind, camping is one of the pleasantest and healthiest features of life in the East. But a hobby she must have, or the long lonely hours, during which the door of her husband's office tent is hermetically sealed to her, will hang very heavily on her hands.

And now an end. Be it remembered

only that the foregoing inadequate sketches of Punjab life do not, by any means, represent the ways and worries of India as a whole. Climate and customs differ appreciably in all the four great Presidencies of our vast Empire; yet one dominant feature marks them all. Their men and women are primarily social, secondarily domestic; and the reason of this state of things is not far to seek. English men and women in India are, as it were, members of one great family, aliens under one sky. Their social conditions have been handed down to them from the days when India practically meant life-long banishment; and so long as they hold by these India will be a pleasant and friendly land, even though it be a land of exile.

CHAPTER III.

MOTHER.

“I do perceive here a divided duty.”

—SHAKSPERE.

IF marriage complicates a woman's life in India, the advent of children—blessed advent though it be,—scarcely tends to simplify matters. At no time, and in no land, is it an easy thing to keep in perfect balance the conflicting duties of wife and mother. But in India it is hardest of all. If a woman needs loyalty, strength, and fearlessness anywhere, it is there.

From the hour that a nursery is established under her roof, the Anglo-Indian mother must be prepared for a hand-to-hand

contest with the two great gods of the East—Dirt and *Dastūr*: a contest in which supervision—constant, personal supervision—is the one weapon that can never fail. But here, as always in India, we find her torn in two between the imperative demands of society and home: and as the small sweet hands cling closer about her heart, the voices of home and conscience will not easily be put to silence, or ignored. She will be a stranger to peace till the problem has been frankly faced—and solved.

Where money permits, the solution will frequently take the form of an English nurse: a step in the right direction. Yet even an English nurse is no less liable than her mistress to suffer from the effects of the climate, from the all-pervading tendency to let things slide: and it is just this insidious atmosphere of slackness, coupled with the

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absence of nursery discipline, that makes the Anglo-Indian child a byword in England, and too often embitters its first years of life "at Home." Those first years "at Home" — how willingly the young mother thrusts the thought of them out of her heart! Yet, defer them as she may, there is no thrusting them out of her child's life: and every woman worthy of her calling will see to it that the inevitable change shall be as little painful as may be for all concerned. To this end she will be zealous in guarding her children from promiscuous intimacy with the native servants, whose propensity to worship at the shrine of the *Baba-lōg* is unhappily apt to demoralise the small gods and goddesses they serve. There are those who sneer at this form of zeal as a "fad." But facts cannot be sneered away: and the foster-mothers of England could

marshal facts enough to silence all such light-hearted scoffers : while, in India itself, the wisdom of entrusting our children to English nurses from the first is far more widely recognised than it was fifteen years ago. Yet is the "base rupee" a factor which even the most devoted mother cannot afford to overlook : wherefore an English nurse still remains a luxury rather than a *sine quâ non* in Anglo-Indian homes.

But the problem of nurse or ayah pales, all too soon, before one of infinitely greater moment—the rival claims of India and England ; of husband and child. Sooner or later the lurking shadow of separation takes definite shape ; asserts itself as a harsh reality ; a grim presence, whispering the inevitable question : "Which shall it be ?" A question not lightly to be answered : if indeed, in generalised form, it

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can be answered at all. Every woman, when her time comes, must face it frankly, from her own individual standpoint; and thresh out her own individual answer according to her lights. An unsatisfactory one it is bound to be, at best; and countless brave hearts have been strained to breaking point during those bitter hours of indecision.

Love him as she may, it costs more for a wife, and still more for a mother, to stand loyally by husband in India, than the sheltered wives of England can conceive: and the rare woman whose heart is balanced equally between the two great loves of her life, finds herself, at the moment of crisis, in a far sorrier case than her more one-sided sisters. Be her decision what it may, it will not be come at without wakeful nights of anxious self-communing and deliberation:

nor may she hope, either way, to escape the poisoned arrows of regret.

But for many—possibly the majority—the struggle is less severe. Strong temperamental bias may even eliminate it altogether; so fatally easy is it to enlist conscience on the side of our urgent desires. The woman who is a born helpmate and companion to the man she loves will inevitably persuade herself that her place is at his side: while she who is primarily a mother will find in the helplessness of her children a conclusive argument against shifting her God-given privileges and responsibilities on to other shoulders, however willing these may be to bear them. In every case the thoughtful woman finds herself hedged about with a host of minor considerations, to all of which due weight must be given: and one

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of these, at least, is worth emphasising. Wherever there is delicacy, there the keen anxious eye of love is needed to detect and check minor symptoms that may lead to serious illness, or even loss of life. Child or husband, the claim of physical weakness is supreme.

There remains also the man himself, who may greatly help or hinder her in her bitter hour. Mere selfishness apart, some men are unquestionably more dependent on their wives than others: some again will be jealous of their very children, and will stoutly refuse to see why they and their comfort should be sacrificed to a "woman's fad": while, on the other hand, there are always cheerful souls who in no way object to an occasional spell of bachelor life, though the wives of such are not often as grateful

as they might be for this amiable idiosyncrasy,—simplify matters how it may. Happily, however, there do exist men and women whom love has so triumphantly incorporated that each is ready as the other to face any sacrifice marriage may demand of them. And verily they have their reward!

But whatever her ultimate decision, there are two resolves that the Anglo-Indian mother will do well to make and keep, so far as in her lies. In the first place, she should at least go home with her children, and see them safely launched upon their new path of life; in the second, she should register a vow, and keep it—Fate permitting—never to desert either husband or children for more than three or four years at a stretch. Think of it, English wives and

mothers, and let the thought keep the door of your lips when you are tempted to sit in judgment on the Anglo-Indian woman and all her works!

Nor is the personal problem all. The question of "which" merely gives place to the question of "when." Sooner or later—cruelly soon, it seems to most of us—comes the inevitable moment when the voice of conscience can no longer be silenced; when the very love where-with she loves her children is become a two-edged sword that shall pierce her heart; and she knows that they must go: knows that there is a limit of age beyond which she dare not keep them without risk of handicapping them, physically and morally, in the race of life. Physically, because the staple foods of childhood have far less nutritive value

in India than in England, and the constant moving comes harder every year upon their sensitive nervous systems, to say nothing of the difficulty of obtaining pure and suitable food at Indian rest-houses and railway stations: morally, because routine and discipline are not easily enforced in a land where constant allowance must be made for the climate and the life; and because—let India's champions say what they will—it is still less easy to keep the eager, all-observant little minds fearlessly upright and untainted in an atmosphere of petty thefts and lies, such as natives look upon as mere common-sense and good policy. Children are quick to discover this; and the idea is both inviting and infectious to some temperaments,—far more so than to others. For here, as elsewhere, it is

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the fine-fibred nature—responsive, impressionable, capable of the highest development—that is most apt to suffer harm in body and mind.

Thus, to the question “when,” as to that of “which,” no abstract answer is forthcoming. It is a problem every woman must face and solve for herself when her bad moment comes; though most thoughtful mothers agree in fixing the limit of age at seven years; and few will deny that the sooner after the fifth year a child can leave India, the better for its future welfare. This is a hard saying; and it is perhaps needless to add that it is rarely acted upon. For in the depreciated rupee human weakness finds an ally of the strongest; and more young lives have paid dearly for its supremacy than those who cannot

or will not face facts are ever likely to believe.

But early or late the cruel wrench must come,—the crueller, the longer deferred. One after one the babies grow into companionable children; one after one England claims them, till the mother's heart and house are left unto her desolate. Empty nurseries, empty verandahs; only the haunting music of small footsteps and clear voices still troubles and glorifies her dreams. Yet in all likelihood she will continue to dance and ride and entertain with undiminished zest. Heartlessness? Frivolity? In a few cases, possibly, but in most the sheer pluck of the race that has a prejudice in favour of making the best of things as they are, and never whimpering over the inevitable. Consider the

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words of one who may be reckoned among these last: "Indian life is full of fears, which lie always in the background of the bravest minds, and which may at any moment start, fully armed, into the line of vision. Above and over all that tragic shadow of separation, which is the keynote of Anglo-India—unavoidable always, and always a tragedy. And yet one laughs, and is as happy as circumstances will permit. One cannot always be shedding tears of renunciation. If we choose the lesser of two evils and stay with the man, we will not damn his life with sadness and recrimination. He has his anxieties too. We take life as we find it. It is ungracious, ungrateful, always to want what we have not got; and yet . . . well, the ache is there!"

Thus, on a note of courage and en-

durance, our Anglo-Indian woman closes her first chapter of motherhood in exile, to reopen it afresh, under other conditions, when the great ships bring back her sons and daughters, grown almost out of recognition, yet not always out of sympathy and love. Then, with a heart sobered by experience and self-knowledge, she takes up her interrupted task, and carries it through to the best of her power, till wedding bells "ring out the old, ring in the new"; till the years of her husband's work are accomplished, and it is she herself who must go, leaving a younger generation to tread the same paths, and uphold the same traditions after their kind.

CHAPTER IV.

HOSTESS AND HOUSEKEEPER.

“Where common dangers each attend,
And common hopes their guidance lend
To light them to the self-same end.”

COMMON dangers, common hopes, common interests: these three go far to make India the friendly land she is; and it is to her Englishwomen that she looks for her social wellbeing.

Every Anglo-Indian wife is of necessity a hostess also in her own degree. Be she the bride of a senior subaltern, wrestling with a monthly screw of three hundred depreciated rupees in a four-roomed bungalow, scantily furnished with the house-

hold effects of other brides, dead or departed; or be she the wife of the Viceroy's self, with Aides and Secretaries to oil the wheels of her household machinery, the same unwritten law holds good. Whatever her department, whatever her pay—the word is bald, but intrinsically Anglo-Indian,—whatever her natural inclination, she must needs accept the fact that her house, and all that therein is, belongs, in a large measure, to her neighbour also.

Nor will acceptance be counted unto her for righteousness. Every one does it as a matter of course. It is part of the immemorial order of things, in the Land of the Open Door, where the wandering bachelor—sure of his welcome,—drops in to any meal of the four; where “little dinners” are improvised, at a few hours’

notice; where a guest may come for a week, and stay for a month without imperilling his chance of being reinvited; the land where all men are brothers under one ban; where those who have, ungrudgingly share their abundance with those who have not. Consider these things, and you will the more readily understand that to be a hostess and housekeeper in India is a liberal education in tact, tolerance, and all-round good management.

Not that in this matter the India of to-day can compare with the India of twenty years ago. Yet, even as it now stands, the amount of entertaining accomplished in a year by a Colonel's wife in India would, if set down in full, contrast curiously with the hospitality shown by a woman of the same standing in Eng-

land. But we have it on good authority that comparisons are odious; and what is feasible and desirable in one country, is not necessarily so in another. Limited space, lack of social unity, and the costliness of labour, all conspire to put promiscuous sociability out of the question in England; whereas, in India, all things conspire to promote and facilitate this, the distinguishing feature of the country.

Go where you will throughout the great Peninsula, and wherever English men and women are gathered together, there will you find friendly doors flung wide to receive you; and within those doors a cordial welcome from the high-priestesses of the drawing-room and the dinner-table, cheerful, kindly, sympathetic, and with no apparent concern in earth

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or heaven but to feed and amuse your unworthy self.

It is in this last quality that the Anglo-Indian presents a striking contrast to her English sister. Our modern Englishwoman is in danger of altogether losing sight of the beauty and value of leisure; in danger of exalting the verb "to do" at the expense of the far more vital and beautiful verb "to be." She must incessantly be up and doing; ay, and, if possible, overdoing!—whether her Alpha and Omega be work or play!

It is not enough for us, in these bustling times, to be just women; to keep alive the grace, the poetry, the soul—so to speak—of a material age. Thus we are apt to lose in charm what we gain in force and vigour, and it has yet to be proved that the loss does not

outweigh the gain. One thing at least is certain: your eternally busy woman will never, as hostess, attain to the same perfection as she who is mistress of the lost art of being idle, or of appearing idle, when occasion demands. In this art the Anglo-Indian woman, broadly speaking, excels. In her cool, dim drawing-room, with its soft carpets and its reposeful easy-chairs, she seems the incarnation of limitless leisure—a leisure in which intimate talk blossoms and flourishes, unchilled by the vacant eye, the unmeaning smile, the vague acquiescence of her who itches to be up and doing, and is making a noble but futile effort to conceal the fact. Such an one may be a woman of unequalled excellence; but a hostess of real charm she will never be.

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Let it not be hastily presumed that India has the magic power of moulding a perfect hostess out of any sort of feminine material, and that England nips that engaging talent in the bud. The true hostess is born, not made ; but if any land can make her, she may safely be commended to the land that will not be hurried, nor permit others to hurry, even along the path of good works. Nevertheless, there be many women so inveterately and indiscriminately industrious, that even India—the great mother of sleep and dreams—cannot prevail upon them to sit still. But these must not hope to be beloved either by their servants or by their guests : for experience proves that the most successful housekeepers and hostesses are not found among those women whose minds, and

tongues, and feet run incessantly upon household matters, but among those who—by hidden method and management—give a surface impression of large leisure, and of a mind free to give its undivided attention to the subject or the individual of the moment.

Thus much for the attributes of our hostess. What of the duties she will be called upon to fulfil? Who and where-soever she be, she will never escape the ubiquitous dinner-party. India is the land of dinners, as England is the land of five o'clock teas. From the Colonels' and Commissioners' wives, who conscientiously "dine the station" every cold weather, to the wives of subalterns and junior civilians,—whose cheery, informal little parties of six or eight are by no means to be despised by lovers of good com-

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pany and simple fare,—all Anglo-India is in a chronic state of giving and receiving this—the most delightful, or the most excruciating form of hospitality.

And who but the hostess is responsible for the destined adjective? She it is who consigns the nervous *débutante* to the latest joined “thrice-born” civilian, who will not stir his little finger to set her at her ease. She it is who, in a praiseworthy impulse of economy, buys her champagne from the local Parsee store-dealer,—pink champagne, of a brand sarcastically christened *Bahut Accha* (Very Good) by ungrateful bachelors. She it is, also, who detects the budding love affair and lays her covers accordingly; who, at the expense of a little forethought, converts grass-fed beef and goat-mutton into mysterious delicacies, pleasing to the palate, and soothing to

digestions sorely tried by the familiar "Billy fares"¹ of the Mess and Club *khan-samah*. Great, indeed, is her power, and mercilessly does she, at times, misuse it! But let it not be forgotten that her part, especially in a large station, is no easy one to play; and those who lightly criticise her *menus* and her "cellar," too often forget that there may be sons and daughters, "at Home," to whom monthly drafts must be forwarded at a ruinous loss; so that the margin left for squandering upon her fellow-exiles' palates may be narrower than they suppose.

In regard to the guests themselves, a few minor pitfalls are worthy of consideration. Avoid asking many men and women of the same department or regiment to meet one another. Such a mistake, made in all inno-

¹ "Bill of fare."

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cence, may mortally offend sensitive souls who set great store by such matters! Do not consign a girl to the tender mercies of the fledgling civilian without enlightenment, or she may commit the unpardonable sin of asking him questions about "his regiment," and the subsequent coolness will not add to the liveliness of the table. In the matter of precedence, above all, walk warily; for you are on delicate ground, where a false step may breed life-long enmity! And the hostess reputed immaculate in this respect is assured of lasting popularity among all castes and classes.

But a woman of public spirit, who is not quite crippled by the depredations of the rupee, will be called upon to do more than merely invite the station to dinner. If she possess a garden and tennis-court, afternoon parties will be expected of her, and the art

of making a tennis-party enjoyable for all concerned is a gift of the gods! With the exception of a few cavalry men,—who recognise no lesser game than polo,—and certain incurable devotees of the shuttlecock, every one in India plays tennis; and between providing the men with “fours” such as their souls love, and so manœuvring that eager, agonised beginners, who triumphantly capture one ball in six, shall not sit shivering with cold and disappointment half the afternoon, the woman who undertakes to give successful tennis-parties need be very sure of her ground.

Regimental entertaining, again, is an art distinct in itself. To the Colonel’s wife falls the largest and most important share, more especially as regards collective hospitality. But Captains’ and Subalterns’ wives, in their degree, are equally bound to exert

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themselves for the "honour of the Regiment." There is, also, a rooted conviction among officers that those who are misguided enough to marry can do no less, by way of reparation, than keep open house for their wiser brethren; a conviction which economical wives, wrestling with straitened means, are apt to regard with scant favour. Hence much domestic dissension, and much regimental criticism.

Such are a few of the duties and difficulties which await the Anglo-Indian hostess. But the woman who aspires to entertain must do more than amuse her guests: she must gain the hearty co-operation of her servants; and, since drudgery is the cornerstone of achievement, she must also master the prosaic art of housekeeping—an infliction that can be reduced to a minimum in the East.

In the first place, an Indian bungalow is as exquisitely simple in construction as an English house is complex. It is not built to please the eye of man, but to shield his body from a merciless sun ; and this it does far more effectually than an average English house shields him from the cold. Houses in Bombay and the more southern Provinces are less ponderously severe of build ; but a Punjab bungalow is a mere rectangular block, white- or colour-washed according to its owner's fancy, divided and subdivided into rooms opening one into the other by means of multitudinous doors, or by the simpler device of curtained openings in the wall. Windows there are none, save the wire-netted slits in the wall, fifteen or twenty feet up, and glass doors are only found in the larger, better-finished houses. Here, then, at one fell swoop, is the Anglo-Indian

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housewife rid of a host of minor worries that harrow the souls of her English sisters. For here are neither staircases nor passages to keep in order ; neither blinds nor sashes to repair ; no windows to be cleaned ; no gas-pipes to leak ; no water-pipes to freeze ; no boilers to burst ; no grates to polish—for an Indian fireplace is but a whitewashed cavity in the wall ; and (greatest boon of all) no futile struggles to feed and humour those “daughters of the horse-leech” who call themselves “experienced” maid-servants.

And the working of this amazingly simple household machinery is consigned to eight or ten servants and one mistress ! Small wonder that Indian houses are kept in such clock-work order, and that Anglo-Indian wives are ladies of unlimited leisure. Nor has all yet been revealed.

From the Colonel’s “lady” to the Sub-

altern's "poor thing," all are exempt from the burden of personal marketing. Even were it possible for an Englishwoman to compete with the eel-like slipperiness of bazaar stall-holders, *dastúr* (custom), the tyrant of the East, would forbid her doing it, and no self-respecting Mahomedan would remain a week in her service if she did. Away south in Bombay and Bangalore—hotbeds of progress and innovation—it is rumoured that great clean market-places have been set up by an officious Government; that the "Memsahib" is waxing bold, and unmindful of the immemorial rights of her cook. But the native of the North is suspicious of all new movements, more especially when they threaten his most cherished and profitable perquisites.

Here, then, we have the first of two

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great facts which enables girls, whose training for marriage has been carried on mainly in ball-rooms, and at picnics and tennis-parties, to blossom eventually into creditable housekeepers.

The second fact in their favour is the excellence of native servants as a whole. A few Anglo-Indians may regard this assertion as a "sentiment open to doubt." But let them endure, for a year or two, the self-satisfied incapacity of the "experienced" maid-servant, and they will rise up and call the brown man blessed. The worst charges brought against native servants are uncleanness and a propensity to petty thefts and lies. But, when all is said, are the lower classes of England—despite the advantages of wholesale civilisation—so amazingly clean and honest that we should wax wrathful over

such backslidings in men who have inherited from centuries of ancestors the ability to wear one garment for six months at a stretch; who regard a lie as the wise man's natural weapon of self-defence, and those who fail to make use of it as simple fools? It is the failure to recognise and allow for the racial differences between Eastern and Western standards of conduct, which causes so many Anglo-Indian women to live out their lives in a state of continual causeless irritation and suspicion, degrading to themselves and disheartening to those who serve them. We are apt, most of us, to forget how bewildering—even, how foolish—most of our domestic fads and requirements appear to the Oriental; how, even after years of faithful service, the ways of the *Sahib*

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and the *Memsahib* remain inscrutable as at the first. Remembering this, we ought rather to marvel at his surprising adaptability than to complain because he cannot change his skin at our bidding, which is, in plain terms, what certain irate unthinking Englishwomen seem to expect of him; ignoring the fact that their own ignorance of the man and his language, coupled with a chronic attitude of antagonism, are not calculated to help matters forward.

Since the assertion that an inexperienced wife owes much to the excellence of her servants will scarcely be allowed to pass unchallenged, it may be as well to add that she must be prepared to pay toll for loyal service rendered, for stony places made smooth beneath her uncertain feet—to recognise, without ran-

cour, that the cook makes good his farthing here, his halfpenny there, and is a shade too generous with her sugar, Worcester sauce, charcoal, and other irresistible items; that the bearer takes tithe of her lamp oil, and that the ayah's six-year-old son struts proudly in a shirt whose earlier history is blazoned forth by its fine blue check and striped edgings. Yet how grieved had she declared herself when those new tea-cloths disappeared so mysteriously in the wash! And how soundly she rated the *dhobi* (washerman) for his shameless want of care in the counting out!

But does this sort of thing happen only in the East? And if it did, there are compensations not to be overlooked. For these poor sinners — who thief almost as instinctively as the monkey

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and the squirrel—can be rated, and even fined, at their mistress's good pleasure; while a little human kindness, tempered with justice, will transform them into devoted slaves, who will spare no pains to uphold the honour of her house and table. They never demand an "evening out," and very rarely take a holiday; nor are their employers responsible for their moral and physical welfare, except to the extent of providing each man and his family with a smoke-grimed hut in the *compound*, where he may cook his food and smoke his *hookah* in privacy and peace.

But though her house be a marvel of simplicity, and her servants tractable and willing, the Anglo-Indian housewife must be prepared to cope with more than these; for no *compound* (garden) would

be complete without its live stock—its dog, its horses, its bullocks, its cow, its poultry. One would as soon dream of dispensing with knives and forks as of attempting life in India without a dog on the hearth-rug and at least two horses in the stable. A cow and poultry-yard, though not quite so universal, are seldom lacking, and in well-watered stations a garden is no rare delight. Dusty, rambling wildernesses are these, for the most part overrun with lime- and orange-trees, with bushes of pomegranate and oleander, and with roses of every sort and shade, from the heavy-headed Maréchal Neil to the dainty, lemon-scented snowball, a very fairy among flowers. Not many Englishwomen dare to indulge in actual gardening under an Indian sun; but a practical knowledge of the ways and

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needs of plants is a certain passport to the respect and admiration of the *māli* (gardener), and an excellent safeguard against his simple wiles.

In fine, if a woman wills to keep house successfully in India, she must possess before all things a large tolerance and a keen sense of justice, rare feminine virtues both, even in these days. She must train her mind to look upon petty falsehoods, thefts, and uncleanness not as heinous offences, but as troublesome propensities, to be quietly and firmly checked. Swift should she be also to recognise the trustworthy man, and to trust him liberally. If she be fresh from "Home" she will probably wear out her strength in a righteous endeavour to enforce some consideration for the *inside* of the cup and platter:

an endeavour foredoomed to defeat, since the native is a very Pharisee in this respect, and the heritage of the ages cannot be extinguished at the bidding of a distraught Englishwoman. Like Kipling's "Shut-eye Sentry," she must learn not to *see* all that comes in the way of her eyes ; for with natives, as with children, the art of not seeing, practised sparingly and judiciously, will go far to preserve domestic peace.

A fair command of the language should stand in the front rank of her attainments ; so shall she save both time and temper, and reap the respect of the entire compound. Surely no sight could be more pitiful and ludicrous than that of a woman who has given place to wrath, and is powerless to put it into words : nor can such an one ever hope

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to keep a retinue of a dozen servants under control. But the wise woman—whatever her linguistic capacity—will never lose her temper when dealing with natives. It will avail her nothing: nor will it impress the delinquent one whit. This is one of the few domestic items that she may safely leave to her husband.

Last—and very far from least—she should not fail to acquire a sound working knowledge of lamps, their ways and weaknesses, or feathery showers of smuts and a pervasive odour of kerosene will be her nightly lot. Few things repay care and attention so generously as a lamp, and, on the other hand, few inanimate things so mercilessly revenge themselves upon the careless and the ignorant. And in this case she will receive no help from her faithful servants.

The native dowered with a talent for propitiating lamps has yet to be born. He accepts them, as he accepts many another of the Sahib's unaccountable possessions, with the silent stoicism that is his. He cleans them grudgingly, and feeds them more grudgingly still, for he has need of the oil to burn in the open, saucer-shaped vessels which serve to make darkness visible in his own smoky little hovel. But he and his kind are nothing if not tractable, and in this matter, as in all others, the mistress who *knows* and *insists* will not fail, in due time, to enter into the reward of her labours.

CHAPTER V.

CONTACT WITH EASTERN WOMANHOOD.

“Take up the White Man’s burden—
Ye dare not stoop to less—
Nor call too loud on Freedom
To cloak your weariness.
By all ye cry or whisper,
By all ye leave or do,
The silent sullen peoples
Shall weigh your Gods and you.’

—KIPLING.

BUT the Englishwoman in India does not remain for ever a stranger in a strange land.

The mysterious, compelling fascination of the East must, sooner or later, creep into her heart and dominate her imagination. No woman of intellect, moral feel-

ing, and power of sympathy can live month after month, and year after year, in any part of our great Indian Empire without an awakening gleam of interest that may, or may not, impel her to seek fuller knowledge of the life that pulses and throbs in its teeming cities and sleepy, mud-walled villages; to reach past its surface strangeness and mystery, its unlikeness to her own world of thought and feeling, down to that stratum of humanity which lies at the root of all lives, and makes the wide world one. And surely, by reason of the common bond, a large measure of her love and interest must go out to the gentle, grave-eyed women whose monotonous, simple-seeming lives are too often crowded with very ugly realities.

It was to these silent, self-effacing

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women, "old in grief and very wise in tears," that the Marchioness of Dufferin's heart went out in a great wave of pitying love, before she had spent a year of her life in India. It was for their relief that she conceived and carried out her splendidly practical Female Medical Aid movement, which has wrought such wondrous changes in dim Zenanas where India's women lie in their pain and anguish, nursed by superstition, and doctored by incantations and charms. With a swiftness of insight, born of sympathy and love, Lady Dufferin perceived that the native mind more readily accepts healing of the body than healing of the soul; and upon this perception she based a scheme "so broad in its scope, so profound in its sympathies, so high in its ideals, that it was surely one of the

finest ever evolved from woman's brain and heart": a scheme destined to prove what a power for good the Englishwoman in India may become if she will but move forward with the will of love; and also a striking attestation to the truth that if we would render any real service to India's women we must begin at the right end.

Nor is it indispensable to be a Vice-reine and wealthy in order to help forward a work so well begun. Every mistress of a house has, within her compound, some scope for work in this direction. True, she has only one female servant, but every man in her service is certain to possess a wife and family. For celibacy is an outcome of civilisation, and the Hindu and Mahommedan have yet to discover its advantages. By means of

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this patriarchal system, then, any Englishwoman can find material ready to her hand, should curiosity or sympathy prompt her to take an active interest in the joys and sorrows of those sister-women whom chance has brought together within her gates.

But it does not transpire that she is consumed with zeal to avail herself of the opportunity. Women like Mrs Steel, for instance, would seem to be as rare as they are admirable. Here was a civilian's wife doomed to spend most of her Indian career in ugly little up-country stations, where Europeans were scarce, and social resources at a very low ebb; a state of things calculated, in ordinary circumstances, to produce the languid, fretful * type of femininity, not unknown to travelers on P. and O. steamships. Yet it is

probable that Mrs Steel's seemingly monotonous life teemed with vivid, active interests, and that she was a total stranger to that deplorable state of mind known among pleasure-hunters as "boredom."

It may be argued that few women are endowed with the exceptional gifts which Mrs Steel enjoys; and also that the majority, being amply occupied with home duties and social pleasures, prefer to leave their Aryan sisters in the hands of those who have a natural taste for philanthropy, and who have made India's women the hobby of their lives. There is some justice in such an argument, since it seems that at all hazards *il faut s'amuser*; and the world's "odd women" supply workers in plenty, who are thankful for the addition of so absorbing an interest to their lives.

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In large Indian stations an Englishwoman is rarely overburdened with unoccupied hours. But it is to those whose lot is cast in the dreary little out-stations—of which there are no lack on the Civil Service List—that Mrs Steel's example might well prove profitable and stimulating. What though they be incapable of achievements attained by her unconquerable energy, they may at least contribute their "mite" toward the increase of that love and respect for the "British Raj," which it is the duty of every English man and woman in India to uphold when and whenever opportunity offers. If they would but rouse themselves to take an intelligent interest in the life around them, to learn something of its hardships, its anxieties, its quaintly childish pleasures and amusements; if they

would but hold out friendly hands to their simple-hearted sisters, they would find the task at once simpler and more possible than they had believed: and for themselves they would reap reward in the widening of their own sympathies and interests; in the blessed freedom from that settled, dreary discontent which is the heritage of the idle, the narrow-minded, and the self-absorbed among womenkind.

But, despite possibilities and occasional opportunities, the fact remains that only a small minority of Anglo-Indian women come directly into touch with the lives of their Aryan sisters. Those who come to the East with the definite purpose of working for its peoples are not as yet under consideration, and among the women destined by circumstances to

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spend their lives in India, whether they will or no, there are singularly few who interest themselves in the people in whose midst they live, and upon whom they are dependent for all the minor comforts of life. To minds unacquainted with the East in all its unlovely actuality—its dust, heat, dirt, disease, and its all-pervading atmosphere of inertia—this lack of common fellow-feeling may well appear strange, and even reprehensible. But “whoso judges harshly, is sure to judge amiss”: and we on the hither side should remember that distance lends enchantment, not to “views” alone, but to duties also; that the work lying on our threshold rarely appears to us as attractive or imperative as that which, with righteous severity, we chide our neighbour for having left undone.

To the average Englishwoman—with whom cleanliness ranks before holiness—the accumulated dirt of ages, together with the pests and diseases consequent on it, would, in themselves, suffice to check such benevolent impulses as might chance to visit her heart: and when to these are added a death-dealing sun, a hazy knowledge of facts, a lurking uncertainty as to how her advances would be received, the probable discouragement of her husband, and the tendency—so soon acquired in India—to follow the line of least resistance, it is hardly surprising that the needs of India's women should fail to rouse her, or that she should turn her eyes away from beholding tragedies, with which she has neither the capacity nor the inclination to cope.

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Only by personal acquaintance with our vast Empire can any adequate idea be gained of the stupendous task of "enlightening" its teeming millions, or of the multitudinous and disheartening obstacles which trip up the confident "reformer" at every turn. Something of this has been forcibly and vividly depicted by Kipling in his 'Naulakha,' wherein we read how all that the zeal, energy, and sympathy of two American women had accomplished in a Native State was brought to naught by the trade-mark upon certain mustard plasters used in their hospital! The plasters bearing this strange device were denounced by the ever-resourceful "holy man" as evil charms, and in a single day the hospital was emptied of its patients. Anglo-Indians are not ignorant of these things,

and, being themselves birds of passage, are not unwilling to excuse their own inactivity by magnifying difficulties which undoubtedly exist.

Setting aside, however, any consideration of the larger schemes, in aid of which the women workers of India are putting forth all their powers of mind and heart, it is both possible and commendable that each woman should do what little she can for her own dependants. A native, if unprejudiced by religious bigotry, has the faith of a child in the *Memsahib's* wonder-working pills and powders, and experience justifies his faith. Every self-respecting Asiatic has also an unconquerable horror of the hospital and all its works; and the mistress who can save him or his women-folk from its tender mercies will earn

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his life-long gratitude. There are, of course, cases where the barrier of caste stands between the sufferer and the remedies which might save his life. But these are happily rare, since Hindus of the higher castes are only able to undertake a limited number of domestic duties.

And here a few words as to the relation between the Anglo-Indian mistress and her ayah may not be out of place. With this particular type of Eastern womanhood (not the highest, by any means) every Englishwoman in India is constrained to have dealings; and it is hers to see that those dealings are such as shall not tarnish the honour of her nationality or her sex. To this end she should never forget that the woman from whom little of her social and domestic life is hid, judges her conduct by Eastern

standards, and communicates those judgments without reserve to an admiring circle of listeners over her evening hookah. For the ayah is a bone-bred gossip; her tongue is a stranger to the golden fetter of truth; and without risk of serious misstatement, it may almost be said that the unscrupulous chattering of her and her kind has done more to darken understanding and confirm countless misconceptions than any of the ways and works of Englishwomen themselves. It may be only a very little in each case, but "drops of water falling, falling, brim the *chattie* o'er," and behold the harm is done, and Anglo-Indians must accept and suffer from the results.

It is a true saying—one that should never be far from the minds of Englishwomen in India—that for the upholding of British

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prestige in the East, "far more credit is due to the individual men and women who have carried out in their lives the loftiest conceptions of English truth and virtue, than to the collective wisdom of the office in Downing Street." And in these days of unrest, when the most optimistic cannot shut their eyes to the decline of that prestige, through India's loss of confidence in our national strength, when the very loftiness of our justice and altruism bids fair to undermine our Empire, the individual man and woman may still, in their degree, help to defer or hasten a catastrophe that only a policy of power—just, yet unflinching power—can remotely hope to avert.

In these days, too, when education behind the Purdah seems tending towards an ultimate lifting of the veil, it lies with

the Englishwoman in India to prove, by the simplicity and uprightness of her own way of life, that a woman, being free in all things, may yet refrain from using her liberty as a cloak of vanity and folly ; that tender womanliness and self-effacement may, and do, go hand in hand with an unrestricted outlook upon the world at large : a fact that Orientals—the women no less than the men—are singularly slow to believe.

CHAPTER VI.

WOMEN WORKERS : FEMALE MEDICAL AID.

“ If she have sent her servants in our pain,
If she have fought with Death and dulled his sword,
If she have given us back our sick again,
And to the breast the weakling lips restored,—
Is it a little thing that she hath wrought ?
Then Life and Death and Motherhood be nought.”

—KIPLING.

ENGLISHWOMEN in India may be roughly grouped into two classes—the devotees of work and the devotees of “play”; and one only characteristic have these in common—both are in desperate earnest. In all other respects their lives are antipodal as the poles. Side by side they live and work in their own fixed grooves ; across

an impassable gulf of unlike aims, and hopes, and experiences, they clasp hands and exchange platitudes more or less sincere ; and at times, impelled by the fellow-feeling of mutual exile, each will temporarily invade the other's territory. But even so their intercourse rarely goes beyond the contact of shell with shell.

Those whose life is work will be tempted, at intervals, to seek fitful relaxation in that world of laughter and leisure which is never very far to seek in India ; but, being most often weary in mind and body, small refreshment is theirs. Those, on the other hand, whose life is "play"—of a cheerful and vigorous sort—do now and again descend from Olympian heights into an India that lies beyond their own charmed circle—a toilsome, unromantic world of schools and hospitals and zenanas, where white-

faced women, with earnest, eager eyes, work, year in year out, at a task which might have daunted Hercules himself. Clean, cool, and well-dressed, with smiles of languid interest and appropriate comments, they flit through this unenticing region of stress and strain, and pass on to their own lighter, merrier, more familiar world. Some among them look upon the misguided zeal of their countrywomen with tolerant cynicism; some are roused to passing sympathy and interest; some are frankly bored; and some few, though they must needs pass on, never forget.

Of these was the Marchioness of Dufferin, whose sincere, unassuming sympathy and interest resulted in the great Female Medical Aid Fund;—in her own words, “A national association, with a central committee, full central funds, and branches in

every part of India.” Its three primary objects were these :—

I. *Medical tuition*, including the teaching and training of women in India as doctors, hospital nurses, assistants, and midwives.

II. *Medical relief* in every possible form, to be carried on solely by women, native or European.

III. The supply of trained female nurses and midwives for women and children in hospitals and private houses.

Two distinctive features of this noble scheme are worthy of note as indicating the keen insight into native character and prejudice shown in all Lady Dufferin's dealings with India's inscrutable peoples. In the first instance, the scheme was designed to be, before all things, a *national* association. Its founder “grasped what

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few Indian reformers do, that if the stream of medical aid was to be an abundant one, spreading its benefits far and wide, the source must be from within, and not one dependent on the precarious supplies from home charities and Englishwomen's enterprise." The end of ends underlying the whole splendid effort was "to carry help and alleviation into the remote chambers of zenanas and *bibi-ghars*, behind whose jealously-closed doors no unrelated man might pass; and to which, if such assistance were to be taken, it must be by the hands of trained women"; preferably women of like nationality and caste. To wives and mothers thus jealously guarded, the countless hospitals and institutions maintained by the Indian Government are of no more avail than their own incantations and charms; or so intense is the

Purdah woman's shyness of strangers, that not even the inducements of female attendance and complete seclusion from the eye of man could render the idea of a hospital anything but abhorrent to her.

To this and other Purdah prejudices was due the second distinctive feature of the Dufferin Fund—the decision, after duly weighing pros and cons, to keep converts out of its wards : a decision that could not fail to provoke a cannonade of unfavourable criticism from certain quarters. None the less was it rooted in wisdom and in intimate knowledge of those whose interests were at stake. Lady Dufferin was aware that hospitals, supported by mission agencies, are available for native Christian women ; that the Civil hospitals present no obstacles to such ; also (and herein lies the kernel of the whole matter) that caste Hindu and

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Mahommedan women regard as pariahs all those of their race who have accepted Christianity : and, since the central aim of the fund was to bring medical relief and help within reach of the majority, the one possible means to that end was courageously adopted forthwith.

Yet despite all that money, tact, and stringent regulations could achieve, high-caste zenana women have shown no disposition to avail themselves freely of the medical skill placed at their disposal ; possibly because female life is of no great value in the East. Husbands are apt to argue that, since a dead wife is so easily replaced, it were foolishness to spend large sums upon doctor's bills. For it is the *wife*, the mother of sons, rather than the individual *woman* by whom the Asiatic sets such store ; and, since the supply greatly exceeds the

demand, his lack of solicitude, if not admirable, is scarcely to be wondered at.

And there are other obstacles also, in the innate ideas and customs, which prevent those for whom these benefits were designed from profiting by them as fully as they might do. Nor is this surprising if we look nearer home. Even with the knowledge that we have of the skill and kindness of our hospitals, there are still few of the upper or middle classes who care to enter one, even with the privacy of the paying ward. Among Purdah women there is always an intense shyness of strangers as well as home-sickness in its most exaggerated form when away from their usual surroundings. And, as India goes, the idea is still a new one. Weighed against the customs and traditions that have crystallised through the centuries, the innovations of a decade are

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as dust in the balance. Moreover, in scope and practice, the Dufferin Fund was quite fifty years in advance of its time: and the climax of its triumph then may yet be to come.

How vast is the mass of superstition and prejudice to be done away with can only be realised by those whose lives are one long crusade against the evil results thereof—those (to take but one instance) who have seen something of the ways of native midwifery, of the ignorant, insanitary, and even cruel practices enforced by the dual tyranny of custom and religion. Universally prevalent is the stifling birth-fire of kindled charcoal, which smoulders beneath the *charpai*¹ of the new-made mother,—for ten days, if she be a Mahommedan; for six if she have the good fortune to be a Hindu.

¹ String bed.

Among certain castes nothing during that time may be removed from the room; nor is any washing allowed except of the infant's clothes, and even these must be dried within this purgatorial prison-house. For the first three days, also, the unhappy mother is doomed to a diet of tumeric, molasses, and stimulating spices and condiments. The fact that she so frequently survives this treatment—or, rather, this *mal-treatment*—and that fever at such times is comparatively rare, still constitutes one of India's most inscrutable medical problems.

The task of making headway against such practices as these must needs involve a trial of patience long drawn out; but the truest progress is slow in the making, and in this instance the reward is sure. All work in India which concerns itself with the moral and physical welfare of its women

is work that will tell in the long-run; for woman is the lever, the only infallible lever, whereby sunken nations are upraised. Higher culture for the Babu and the youngling princes of the blood has done comparatively little to elevate its recipients beyond puffing them up with that false pride which a little knowledge engenders. It is the *moral* culture of her women that is needed to lift India out of the rut of the ages; for power is hers, weakling though she be, to make or mar mankind at her good pleasure.

The advanced woman of the West is apt to conclude over-hastily that the narrow, hidden life of her Eastern sister, with its lack of freedom, its limited scope for self-development and individual action, must needs constitute her a mere lay figure in the scheme of things; a being wholly incapable of influencing the larger issues of life;

whereas a more intimate knowledge of facts would reveal to her the truth that, from that same hidden corner, and by the natural primal power of her sex, the Eastern woman moulds the national character far more effectually than she ever could hope to do from the platform or the hustings.

What though her individual life be held somewhat cheap, yet is the worship of the woman-ideal, as wife and mother, an integral part of the Hindu religion. In proof whereof consider this from the Mahabharata :—

“ Women, oh King, should always be worshipped and treated with affection. There where women are treated with respect the very deities are said to be filled with joy. There where women are not worshipped all acts become fruitless. . . . Women deserve to be honoured. Do ye men show them

honour. The righteousness of men depends upon women. All pleasures and enjoyments also completely depend upon them. Do ye serve and worship them. Do ye bend your will before them."

This fact was not overlooked by Lady Dufferin; and herein doubtless lies the chief value of her far-reaching scheme, that its ultimate aim is to roll away the stones from before the darkened doors; to flood the dim, cobwebbed corners of India's homes with the life-giving light of healing truth and love.

CHAPTER VII.

WOMEN WORKERS : MEDICAL AID AND MISSIONS.

“ Does the road wind up-hill all the way ?

Yes, to the very end.

Will the day's journey take the whole long day ?

From morn to night, my friend.”

—C. ROSETTI.

To any woman skilled in the divine art of healing, and courageous enough to push steadily onward in the face of disappointment and soul-sickening apathy, to work her way through a stone wall, and banish from her vocabulary the poor-spirited word “impossible,” our Indian Empire offers an inexhaustible field of labour. Its densely-packed cities are hotbeds of disease and

physical degeneracy. Dust and the fly sow cholera and typhoid broadcast throughout the land. The sun's arrows smite the unwary by day, and by night the treacherous breath of earth breeds fever in his bones. Conquerors and conquered are bowed down beneath one yoke; for the sickness that walketh in the noonday knows no respect of persons. True, the white man imports doctors for his alleviation, and the brown women are blest by the benefits of the Dufferin Fund: but even so there remains work in plenty for those equipped with the necessary knowledge, plus energy, sympathy, and perseverance. These last are indispensable. The woman who thinks to achieve a successful Indian career without them is foredoomed to failure, overwrought nerves, and a broken heart.

In no climate and under no conditions

is a life-long duel with disease and death a matter to be lightly taken in hand ; but in this age of restless nervous energy, a brave woman in search of work worth doing, might do worse than devote her powers to the service of India's stricken millions, black or white. The harvest is plenteous ; the labourers none too many ; and the field as varied as it is vast.

Four spheres of work, at least, lie open to the qualified aspirant : work that leads neither to fame nor fortune, but which, nevertheless, carries its own exceeding great reward. For wheresoever sickness is, there will assuredly be scope for woman's sympathy, energy, and zeal. Take, as an instance, the chief woman's hospital in Calcutta, the Dufferin Victoria. This institution, over and above its complicated internal work, makes a special feature of

out-patients, who are estimated at over 20,000 in the year. It is good to realise that the healing of this multitude of sick is accomplished entirely by English, Eurasian, and native medical women working loyally in concert: a state of affairs that would have seemed little short of miraculous forty years ago.

The Government of India's State-supported service of medical aid maintains over 2000 hospitals of varying scope and size. In most of these the chief appointments are held by men; but capacity and vigour will rarely fail to find employment, irrespective of sex. And though work may be hard, the climate discouraging, holidays rare, and payment disproportionate to the energy expended, yet the woman who sincerely desires to serve her fellow-creatures, will find in the life a satisfaction

such as no onlooker would ever conceive to be possible.

Another promising field for medical work exists among the Native States of India, all by now more or less enlightened, and more or less disposed to patronise the lady doctor and all her works. Here, as elsewhere, hospitals have multiplied exceedingly : for whensoever an enlightened maharajah wishes to make a public exhibition of his charity, or, in other words, to “catch the eye” of an appreciative Viceroy, he inaugurates a fine public building,—a hospital for choice.

In addition to this praiseworthy predilection, the wealthier princes more and more tend to engage resident lady doctors exclusively for the benefit of their zenanas. These appointments, though lucrative, are not always so desirable as they may appear

to women weary of hospital routine, continuous work, and straitened means. Tact, diplomacy, nerve, and a strong will are indispensable to the Englishwoman who accepts the position of paid dependant to an Indian prince. Whom he pays he rules ; and he may even derive a certain satisfaction from keeping the English men and women in his employ fully alive to their anomalous position. There are many to whom such a state of things would be intolerable, and these will do well to keep clear of Native States and their fair-sounding offers.

But generalities are almost as odious as comparisons. For there are princes *and* princes : and given one of the right sort, the work itself must needs be of exceptional interest ; rich in opportunities of obtaining first-hand knowledge, and of

bestowing practical help and sympathy upon those masses of jealously-guarded women who, having eyes, see not, and having ears hear not, aught of the life that lies beyond their own windowless walls.

To these workers it is given to penetrate into the hidden mysteries of zenana life; to lay up a store of facts that enable them to silence the outcry of the ignorant sentimentalist, who would have England believe that Eastern wives—downtrodden, ill-used, and imprisoned—invariably lead lives of tragic gloom, and water their couches with tears shed for the lack of joys whereof they have never even dreamed. Sorrow and pain they endure, in common with womenkind at large; but, taken as a whole, the abiding feature of zenana life is a very unromantic dulness,

enlivened by jealous squabbles and petty triumphs, and glorified by religion, children, and personal sacrifice. Here and there a rare nature will crop up, whose instinct is for freedom, and whose spirit chafes against the bars, as a bird's against its cage; but the majority are very well content with such things as they have—a state of mind which scarce commends itself to Western philanthropists, since content spells stagnation, and discontent progress.

Yes, the Indian wife and mother is happy enough, after her own fashion, so long as she is blessed with health; but in her hours of pain and weakness she is worthy of all pity, all love, all that Western energy, sympathy, and knowledge can achieve for her relief. Neglect of the sick, and callousness to their sufferings, is unquestionably one of the least prepossess-

ing traits of Indian character. "It is scarcely possible," writes one who knows, "to exaggerate the misery of the scenes witnessed by the Zenana medical missionary, as she takes her place by the side of some poor pain-tossed one, and looks round in vain for any sign of comfort or alleviation in the wretched apartment. It may be illness in which the utmost quiet, the most absolute rest, are imperatively demanded; or it may be that the sand of life is running out. Yet the room, roof, or courtyard, as the case may be, is crowded with noisy women, not one attempting to relieve the sufferer; while beneath the bedstead—generally too short for the patient to lie at ease—is assembled the family stock of poultry; and dogs, goats, and children divide between them the little remaining space."

This picture brings us to the third field of healing open to Englishwomen in the East,—medical mission work in all its branches: a field that differs from the rest in that it regards the healing of the body as a means to one great end. In the eyes of the medical missionary, the hospital, over and above its *raison d'être*, affords peculiar opportunities for soul-winning; and it is for this reason that high-caste Hindu and Mahomedan women,—the Purdah aristocracy, so to speak,—are debarred from the benefit of its ministrations. Herein lies the main point of divergence between mission work and that of the Dufferin Fund. The boundary line of the one is the base line of the other. And from that base line rises the stony, uphill road of medical mission work; a work demanding all and giving little in return. Yet are its devotees by no means

dismayed, as the following letter (written some years ago from Peshawar) bears striking testimony : “ Your heart would be stirred within you to see what the ladies are doing in India. Here and at Amritsar they are working splendidly. Full of energy, bright, natural, and wonderfully brave, . . . they practically give up all the attractions of European society, and spend their lives for the poor women and children. At Amritsar, two or three of them live in the heart of the city, with no European near them ; and here they do the same.” Whatever be one’s opinion of mission work in the abstract, there can be but one in regard to workers of this calibre ; women whose record of pluck, devotion, and self-sacrifice may well make England proud of her daughters. Slow uncertain progress, disheartening apathy, bitter disappointment,

the many Englishwomen who have made her peoples' welfare the primary object of their lives.

And last, though very far from least, there are the nurses also,—the women indispensable to doctors as to patients; and happily for both they have multiplied in India within the last two decades. Of all vocations open to the unattached woman, here surely is one of the finest; one that makes the most unsparing demands upon heart and brain and body,—the last more than all in a land of vast distances, interminable journeys, and violent extremes of temperature. Five years of nursing in India will test a woman's nerves and health and zeal to the uttermost; and only the elect in mind and body care to outstay that term. But there is no lack of novices eager to take their places in the ranks;

eager to learn at first hand something of the mystery and beauty and terror of that wonderful India, that “after two hundred years still stands before her captors like some beautiful stranger ;—so defenceless, so little understood or known.”

CHAPTER VIII.

WOMEN WORKERS : THE EDUCATION PROBLEM.

“Hard her service, poor her payment,—she, in ancient, tattered
raiment—

India, she, the grim Stepmother of our kind.

If a year of life be lent her, if her temple’s shrine we enter,

The door is shut—we may not look behind.”

—KIPLING.

BUT hard service and poor payment have never yet deterred the Anglo-Saxon from work that was clearly worth doing : and in the teeth of both have countless Englishwomen served their “grim Stepmother” with all their strength, and with all the dogged tenacity of their race. In pestilential cities ; in mud-walled villages ;

through good report and evil; through plague, pestilence, and famine; through suspicion, opposition, apathy, and all the multitudinous ills with which India vainly strives to daunt her benefactors,—these indomitable white women have wrought and striven unceasingly; not altogether in vain.

None the less,—in spite of all that has been said and done, and that ardently, to forward the cause of progress,—honesty cannot refute Miss Noble's statement that “very little which deserves the name of *Education* has yet been attempted in modern India. A machine has been created. An organisation stands ready. But nothing in all this represents the work of the people themselves for ends which they spontaneously perceive to be good in themselves.” “Failed B.A.'s”

and scribblers for the Press have multiplied disastrously enough. But India's peoples, as a whole, are still inclined to look askance at Western teaching, more especially when it threatens to enter that holy of holies, the Zenana, and demolish the most sacred traditions of the race.

And it is not the man—that reputed tyrant—who most effectually bars the way. It is the gentle, invisible woman, whose reserve of obstinacy “all the wild horses in the Empire would fail to move.” She it is who has always been “the true guardian of the Past; and, uneducated, the true enemy of Progress in India.” And so far she possesses no practical incentive to pursue the study of books and sciences. In her eyes marriage and motherhood are the be-all and end-all of life; and these again are inextricably one with the religion

that is its central motive power. The Western craving for independence, personal and mental, is incomprehensible to her for whom self-effacement, in the service of her lord, is the summit of glory and delight. But in passing from the submission of early wifehood to the royal prerogatives of the mother, her eye becomes less single. She grows skilled in the intricacies of the marriage-making, and begins to recognise the possible effect upon this all-important transaction of the rapidly rising standard of education among the men of the land. Educated men are already inclined to demand from their wives a certain degree of knowledge, or at least of interest, in the wider affairs of life: and if anything could reconcile the autocrats of "the inside" to such a detested innovation, it would be the con-

viction that their daughters' matrimonial value would be greatly enhanced thereby.

How far the fruit of the tree of knowledge when plucked is likely to prove digestible, and whether those who eat of it will reap true wisdom and happiness, or mere discontent and unavailing restlessness of mind, are vexed questions which theorists must be left to settle among themselves. For good or ill, India's women are being drawn into the great whirlpool of civilisation. Retreat is out of the question. Advance they will at their own speed; and it lies with their English sisters and teachers so to guide their onward course, that they shall derive the greatest possible benefit and happiness from the strange new element into which they have been thrust by the combined forces of fate and Anglo-Saxon

perseverance. But a hundred and one difficulties beset the path of the progressivist in India. In the first place, the mass of people is as heterogeneous as it is vast. The system of education, for women as for men, must meet the prejudices and requirements of Hindus, Mahommedans, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, and Parsees ; yet must, at the same time, possess an underlying unity of purpose, system, and method.

All those who undertake to teach women and girls in India should, as far as possible, work upon certain fixed broad lines, should at least be agreed upon the essential and fundamental points at issue. But, unhappily for teachers and taught, the two chief educational agencies in India have never worked from the same base line or with the same ultimate end in view.

All Government schools are purely secular; no word of religion is allowed. The attainment of knowledge and the higher development of their mental powers are set before the pupils as ends sufficient in themselves.

In the Mission Schools, on the other hand, education (like bodily healing) is merely a means to the supreme end, towards which all branches of labour converge—the knowledge of Christ and His creed. Two systems fundamentally opposed are, of necessity, incapable of working in unison; and thus has been engendered a deplorable spirit of rivalry, in place of that greatest of all progressive forces, co-operation.

The exclusion of religious teaching from Government schools was enforced upon much the same ground as was Lady

Dufferin's exclusion of converts from her hospital wards. The core of Oriental prejudice against indiscriminate education is the fear lest it weaken religious faith; and the Indian Government, prompted by motives of practical expediency, decided to suppress altogether a subject which threatened to prove a serious stumbling-block in the path of intellectual progress.

Mission teachers, on the contrary, setting aside considerations of present expediency, argue that education minus Christianity must prove a curse rather than a blessing to its recipients; since it tends to destroy their faith without providing them with an adequate equivalent for their loss. Nay, more—since it is certain that the mass of the people can only be reached and moved by their own countrymen, the

Mission schools assert that their chief aim is to produce women sufficiently educated and intelligent to take an active part in the evangelisation of India. How far their progress has been retarded by the purely secular teaching supplied by Government schools it is hard to say; but the fact remains that even were Hinduism being imperceptibly weakened, Christianity is not being accepted in its place. In this case, may not the attitude of Government schools towards religion have as much to answer for as the Mission school tendency to popularise their institutions by reducing Christian teaching to a minimum? Anglo-Indian sympathies incline, on the whole, toward Government methods, and still more so toward the indigenous efforts made by certain of the Native States, as giving more direct proof that

the desire for female education has begun to take a real hold upon India itself.

But over and above the question as to whether the education of India's girls shall, or shall not, include religious instruction, there is a still further division of opinion as to the view from which secular teaching through the vernacular should be regarded. Is it to be "merely a useful scheme of teaching that should assist the masses in their humble, everyday life"; or is it to be treated "as a possible basis leading to higher stages, possibly even the University degree itself"? Mrs Wheeler, a native lady and Government Inspectress of Bengal Schools, is strongly of opinion that the former is the better fundamental idea. "As the outcome, both of her racial knowledge and her actual experience, she deprecates strongly the tendency

to push girls to University distinctions. The results are showy, and look well in school reports ; but in practice, the young women become arrogant, are seldom successful as teachers, and frequently develop hysteria and nervous complaints. It is too great a brain effort with no hereditary preparation."

Exceptions there are, of course, but these serve only to prove the rule, and to emphasise the truth that the more slowly we are content to progress with this great and complex forward movement, the more thorough and satisfactory will be the ultimate results. If the conquest and administration of India be essentially the work of England's men, the enlightening of her wives and daughters is, as essentially, the work of England's women ; and it cannot be said that they have

neglected their share of the white man's burden in the East; but it is impossible to do full justice to the courage and perseverance of individual workers, or to give the home-staying Englishwoman a clear idea of what the task of educating young India practically means, for those who put their shoulders to the wheel, without enlarging her knowledge of the bare facts of her exiled sisters' everyday life and work; and without emphasising the initial fact that India's gradual movement towards mental and national awakening is the net result of countless seemingly futile individual struggles; of daily battles against heat, dust, cholera, and that insidious inertia of soul and body that is the moral microbe of the East.

Three things, yea four, are indispensable to the Englishwoman who attempts

to educate India : tenacity of purpose, adaptability to every sort of circumstance ; a genuine passion for imparting knowledge ; and a fund of patience as inexhaustible as the widow's cruse of oil. Many a woman in England knows the meaning of hard, unremitting work ; but for hard living—really hard living—she must look to the great and glorious East.

Consider this picture of a small mission school in the paddy-fields near Calcutta.

The school is carried on by three sisters, who, though sufficiently well-to-do to live a comfortable, sheltered life in their own island, are content to spend their days among the ignorant inhabitants of the marshy, unhealthy country round about Calcutta. The little village can only be approached by a canal

journey, in a “dug-out,”—a hollowed tree-trunk, towed by men walking on either side of the canal. A short *palki*¹ journey lands the traveller in the midst of a clean, picturesque village, whose only unattractive feature is its water-tanks—green and slimy, and rich in bacilli—lying perilously near the houses; if by courtesy they may be so called. They are built of baked mud and heavily thatched. They contain one room a-piece, and that room boasts but three walls; man, in his undeveloped state, being untroubled by a senseless passion for privacy. The heavy thatched roof, jutting well out on the open side, and supported by slim pillars, forms an impromptu verandah, which ensures a goodly patch of shade, if nothing else; and

¹ Palanquin.

there are days in the year wherein a patch of shade is as exquisite a luxury as the veriest Sybarite could desire.

In one of these "desirable residences" do the three sisters live, and eat, and sleep, when circumstance brings them all together into the village. Three string beds, set in a row, are shielded from the prying gaze of passing villagers by a square of matting slung from the roof; behind which unstable bedroom door the sisters dress and undress night and morning, while a movable screen set in the verandah affords them a certain degree of privacy throughout the day. The eldest of these sisters is the ruling spirit of the place, and lives among her people almost as one of themselves; tramping through the marshy land, up to her knees in water, though she is far from strong.

Lady Dufferin, while in India, visited this little school, and gave prizes and Jubilee medals to 900 children; a proof that where even two or three are gathered together, who knew how to put heart and soul into their work, they shall, in due time, reap if they faint not. .

But without belittling this fine example of practical Christianity, it may be well to add that intimate knowledge of Eastern character breeds an increasing conviction that many English teachers, and missionaries, unwittingly diminish their influence by a mistaken zeal in elaborating, unnecessarily, their own privations and discomforts; and by an equally mistaken belief that they can bring themselves into closer touch with the people by living as nearly as possible on the same lines. Now the Oriental is a profound respecter of

persons, as of all outward and visible signs of power; and in his eyes the man who deliberately and needlessly accepts discomfort, is a poor fool, to be humoured and pitied, but by no means worthy of admiration or respect. It may impress him considerably that the Sahib should reach down from his heights to help and teach his Aryan brother; but a permanent descent to Aryan levels merely amazes him, and is apt, as has been said, to engender contempt rather than respect. English men and women, reared upon Christian standards, are slow to realise this attitude of mind in the races with whom they have to do. Hence much misunderstanding on both sides, and a slower rate of progress than need be.

But to return to actualities and the English teacher in India as she is : Con-

sider yet another picture of a village school and its scholars, in an altogether different locality. Here are neither marshy rice-fields, not feather-crested palms, nor the simmering heat of the regions round about Calcutta. Here are flat, far-stretching plains, hard, dry, and dusty; and fierce heat alternates with bitter cold. A sterner, hardier tract of land in all respects is the great province of the Punjab; but here, as there, the irrepressible Englishwoman is at work.

The walls and floor of her schoolroom are of baked mud, the latter overlaid with matting, whereon the great-eyed children squat solemnly in rows, the elder ones only provided with low benches, which serve them for desks. The head teacher is enthroned on a low chair, overlaid with scarlet lacca, whilst her

assistants content themselves with four-legged, rope-bottomed stools. Their small scholars have usually to be "recruited" each morning by an old woman deputed for the purpose, who, passing from house to house, carries off the children to the mud-walled schoolroom, where their patient teachers await their coming. Here they sit them down in an atmosphere of dust, and heat, and flies innumerable, and drone out their lessons in the high monotonous chant so dear to the Eastern heart. Since they most often arrive unwashed and unfed, they soon become hungry, and must needs either run home for a meal, or have their food brought to them. This usually consists of a flat wheaten cake (*chupatti*) with some curds; and those among the children who chance to be Hindus retire to a distant corner, or,

if possible, behind a bedstead tilted on end, in order to protect their meal from any defiling touch or shadow.

Regularity in attendance is vain to hope for. "Inquiry is made for one child—she has gone to a mourning or a wedding; for another—she has fever, or 'her eyes have come' (ophthalmia); for a third—she has fallen off the roof. One has gone on a pilgrimage to some sacred bathing-place; another is 'carrying mud.' There are also numerous festivals when the schools must be closed altogether."

Nor are the pupils of these village schools necessarily children. Their ages may be anything between three or four, and thirty or forty years. It is by no means uncommon for a mother and daughter to be taught in the same school, aye, and even in the same class. But

the elders pupils are, for the most part, widows or forsaken wives, who seek knowledge in order that they may earn an honourable livelihood as teachers. Thus we may find, even in a small school, virgins, brides, widows, and mothers all sitting at the feet of the wonderful white "Miss-sahib," whose knowledge and patience are seemingly inexhaustible; all battling with the same primal mysteries of learning; all striving for the same childishly simple prize. Surely no Western woman, however unimaginative, could look with a heart unmoved upon so quaintly pathetic a scene.

In the normal and high schools of the three Presidencies the arrangements are less primitive, and the work is based upon the latest Western systems. Hindu girls are, as a rule, brighter and more promising

pupils than Mahommedans, the probable reason being that they possess inherited tendencies towards book-learning, which has always been held in high honour by the best men of their race. But the swiftest strides of all have undoubtedly been made by the Parsees on the Bombay side ; and that not in the matter of education only, but in the marked progress towards equality and emancipation attained by their women-folk.

A quarter of a century ago the Parsee woman was practically Purdah ; and to-day she is to be met with everywhere, from the dinner-table at Government House to the open tramways which run to and fro through the streets of Bombay. Many of these gentle little ladies, with their dark eyes and exquisitely-tinted silken draperies, drive, and even ride, fearlessly well ; and

as hostesses in their own drawing-rooms they possess a cultivated charm and a simple dignity peculiarly their own. The Parsees have now practically taken their educational work into their own hands, and have founded several schools, which are carried on without aid or grant from Government, and are therefore entirely free from official inspection.

But apart from the special Parsee development, Madras ranks first among the Presidencies as an educational pioneer; and her claim rests chiefly on the successful movement made there towards carrying on work after the brief school period is ended. It is evident that "so long as girls go to live with their husbands at fourteen, no matter how sound a foundation of learning may have been laid, the ultimate result can never be more than superficial.

It is a matter, therefore, of importance as well as interest to record that a really earnest effort in the direction of home education has been made." Many teachers are at work in this direction: and an increasing number of India's women are studying thus, carrying their reading on to English, arithmetic, history, and geography; being visited at home weekly by the native governess, and occasionally attending lectures.

More encouraging than all, perhaps, to workers in this vast area is the steadily increasing interest displayed by Maharajahs of Native States in the advancement and enlightenment of their once despised female subjects. Of these, Mysore undoubtedly takes the lead, not merely as regards female education, but in its official discouragement of early marriages. "The

example in this direction, or in that of education, shown by the Native States, has more weighty influence than is often admitted ; and innovations launched by them are likely to be accepted far more readily and with better grace than anything initiated under British prestige." Bhaunagar, also, a State very rarely honoured by the presence of the ubiquitous British tourist, is singularly advanced in matters educational ; and can boast a goodly number of girls' schools supported by the State. The Maharajah himself, by way of example, sent his own daughter to study at the Maharaj school, whose pupils are drawn almost entirely from the leading and wealthiest families in the State. This school was established as far back as 1857 ; and in its earliest days fought a long, hard battle against prejudice and

indifference. The whole educational department in Bhaunagar was (and perhaps still is) under the superintendence of an Englishwoman of wide culture and unerring sympathy with the ways and workings of native character; "whilst she grasps, as so many well-intentioned Englishwomen fail to do, the fact that the teaching suited to girls at home is not of necessity the best for their sisters in India." This last touches one of the many weak points in our zealous—if at times misguided—attempts to pour Western culture into Eastern vessels. Another initial mistake is the tendency of English teachers to overlook two vital facts in regard to their pupils: first, that here is no question of enlightening minds hitherto left in barbarous ignorance; second, that as the keynote of the old education of Indian

women was *character*, the new cannot aim lower. The main feature in their training should not be reading and writing, but the power to grasp clearly and with enthusiasm the ideas of nationality, and the responsibility of the individual to race and country! Though in respect of the last, teacher and taught might occasionally do worse than change places.

In fine, the opinion of Miss Noble—who has not merely studied Hindu life, but lived it—is worth quoting and considering :—

“Only those can do vital service to the Indian woman who, in a spirit of entire respect for her existing conventions and her past, recognise that they are but offering new modes of expression to qualities already developed, and expressed in other ways, under the old training. Therefore the fundamental task of grasp-

ing and conveying the inspiration of the West must be performed by Easterns for Easterns, not by foreigners. Nor ought the result of such a process to be denationalising. . . . A merely imitative apprehension of the West is indeed the parent of death to the Orient. But to achieve a living, forceful, heart-to-heart appropriation of Western energy, and its retranslation into Eastern terms, is not death, but life."

And there can be little doubt that India will never awake to so vital a renewal of life and thought until the national idea is grasped and approved by her multitudes of veiled women, who, by reason of their worshipful service, dominate the men they serve as unveiled women cannot hope to do.

CHAPTER IX.

ART INDUSTRIES AND NEEDLECRAFT.

“Them hath He filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen.”
—Exodus xxxv.

FROM the days of the children of Israel, until now, skill in art and needlecraft has been to the nations of the East an heritage that cometh of the Lord; and if we of the West had been content to realise this, and to act upon the realisation, India's art industries would never have suffered so great damage at our hands; nor would Sir Alfred Lyall—writing under the pseudonym of a cultivated modern Brahman—

have had cause to review their present condition in the following melancholy strain.

In regard to the moral and material progress made by India under British rule, he says : " I am not so sure whether progress is demonstrable in Art, and I fear that you English have not enhanced the poetical aspect of things in India. Art, in its higher orders, has hitherto, like morality, preferred a religious to a purely utilitarian motive ; and when utility comes too obtrusively into the foreground, the artistic, like the religious spirit, becomes depressed, and loses grasp of its principle. At this hour a Hindu sculptor, in outlying places, will execute temples beautiful in design and detail, because the subject not only exalts and inspires his imagination, but also leaves it quite free. The

introduction of your European patterns is confusing to the spiritual instinct as to form and colour. The imaginative faculty becomes superfluous; also the immense European demand for the finer handicraft of India has demoralised our artisans, who, instead of endeavouring to express the multiform religious idea, however grotesque, are now employed in executing wholesale orders according to sample."

Sir M. Bhownaggree has also drawn England's attention to the neglected state of Indian industries, and is convinced that to apply European education to it is the supreme cause of the deteriorating effect of Western influence upon Indian art. It is organisation in a manner suitable to the country that is so imperatively needed; and the sooner we restore the nobility of

true work, and honour it as we honour courage and self-sacrifice, the better will it be for ourselves and for India's ultimate prosperity. In this one instance, despite an inextinguishable conviction of our own superiority, we should rather have sat at India's feet than have presumed to shackle her free genius with the canons of Western art; to foist upon her our middle-class monstrosities in lieu of her own exquisitely natural grace of workmanship and design.

But art industries in general are not closely connected with our main subject—woman and her work. Even in the essentially feminine art of needlecraft she cannot boast a commercial monopoly, but reserves her skill in weaving and embroidering chiefly for domestic purposes. Commercial needlework is left almost en-

tirely to men, the sole exception being the beautiful *phul-kari* or flower work; and even this, before it was discovered by the British art lover, was used only for adorning the *chudders* or draped cloths worn by the women over their heads. On the Bombay side, where the silken *sari* is worn as headgear, much thought and delicate workmanship are bestowed upon the borders (wide or narrow, according to occasion), without which those graceful draperies are not considered complete.

The encouragement of such purely indigenous and useful branches of needlecraft would have proved an education in itself to both teachers and taught; but instead we must needs set our docile and innately imitative pupils to work upon such marvels of ugliness and cheap showi-

ness as Berlin cross stitch, "water-lily" mats, and crewel-work antimacassars. Indian women delight in small novelties; and work of this degraded type being easy and rapid of accomplishment, they have unfortunately honoured it with an admiration far beyond its deserts. It is no rare thing, in these days, for a zenana visitor to come upon a graceful young Rani, draped and girt about with the strong, rich tones of Eastern colouring, zealously at work upon a coarse magenta "comforter" or some like atrocity—destined to adorn the neck of her lord, and likely, alas, to reach its destination. The sight would be laughable were it not so pitiful. For, to the discerning eye, it is symbolic of a great inward and spiritual falling off, for which, unhappily, we, as a nation, are largely responsible. "In no

branch of Indian art has British influence been so mischievously detrimental as in needlecraft. . . . And the mission schools are to be held responsible for most of the evil that has been wrought in this direction. Drawn, as so large a percentage of the teachers are, from the lower middle classes, and imbued with the worst philistinism of their order, they were equally utterly unable to appreciate the wondrous beauties of form and colour of indigenous embroidery, or to impart a knowledge of anything better than the decorative taste of the back parlour."

For this phase of education—a more important one than many are apt to believe—women of culture with a taste for philanthropy are much needed; and the England of to-day is fairly overrun with such. But who shall persuade them

to face hard service in exile merely for the sake of bestowing upon their awakening Aryan sisters that heritage of culture which they alone can bestow ?

It is in this field of work that Anglo-Indian women (more especially the wives of civilians, police officers, and civil engineers, whose lot is cast in lonely places) might, at the cost of a little human sympathy and interest, a little perseverance and kindly tolerance, do much towards fostering and encouraging capacities which our schools are doing their utmost to destroy. So far, however, Mrs Steel stands alone in this respect ; and she has left behind her such a legacy of good works as has not been bequeathed to India by any other Englishwoman of her sphere of life. In whatever district Fate placed her, she made a point of interesting herself

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keenly in its women, their lives and their work, and in giving special encouragement to all indigenous forms of needlecraft; with the result that even now, in the Punjab, those who wish to procure the handsomest specimens of *phul-kari* work apply to northerly districts where Mrs Steel's name is still known and honoured. Would that her mantle had fallen upon other shoulders when the women of the Punjab lost the invaluable impetus of her strong brain and heart. But for all the success that attended her efforts to raise the standard of work and design among them, not one of all her own countrywomen has been fired to follow her fine example.

Neither Anglo-Indians, then, nor Government instructors, nor women philanthropists over-seas, have exhibited any marked interest

in the restoration to its true level of the vanishing art of needlecraft among Eastern women. Remaineth only the missionary, who, if deficient in taste and culture, is by no means deficient in zeal; and is, moreover, justified in answering all who aver that industrial class work belongs to the realm of the philanthropist rather than the missionary, with the unanswerable question: "Where are the philanthropists who will undertake the work?"

"Let them step forward quickly into this field if they feel so constrained," writes one who is now at work in this department. "But meanwhile, who that hears what abundant opportunities are offered for preaching by word and deed the Gospel of Him who came to minister to the poor and needy, will dare to assert that this is not true missionary work?" Who,

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indeed? Pity only that a few grains of culture, in its widest sense, should be so rarely coupled with genuine religious zeal.

In the face of this general apathy it is encouraging to learn that the Society for the Preservation of Indian Arts has of late years organised a somewhat tardy crusade against the futile production of so much ugly, useless needlework; for futile it is, even from the most severely utilitarian point of view. "Nobody will buy it, for, if any appreciable native demand for it arose for 'decorative' purposes, the machinery of Switzerland and Germany would promptly glut the bazaars with d'oylys and antimacassars of the cheapest and lowest grades of production. Europe certainly does not want it, as our own 'depôts for poor ladies' work' can tell; but,

on the other hand, Europe will purchase good and characteristically native work to an almost unlimited extent."

The mere cultivation of a natural taste for colour and design, and for infusing true artistic purpose into the simplest forms of industrial art, may seem to some, whose lives are crowded with ceaseless occupations, too secondary a matter to be worth the necessary expenditure of time and toil it must involve. But those who know from experience how radiantly the poorest lives may be brightened and beautified by such simple means, cannot fail to perceive how invaluable these must be to women doomed for life to the eternal monotony of four walls and a back courtyard, nor to realise how greatly their influence is needed to stem the incoming tide of utilitarianism, which threatens to annihilate all the finer,

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freer impulses of Eastern artists and craftsmen.

In the meantime, as has been said, the missionary is doing her utmost, according to her lights, by means of industrial classes interlarded with religious instruction, thus killing two birds, yea, three, with one stone; for these classes are organised principally for the benefit of the Hindu widow, than whom no creature living is more deserving of a fellow-woman's pity, help, and love. This reason alone renders mission industrial classes worthy of all encouragement and praise; since they provide congenial occupation and even a modest livelihood for a small proportion of India's millions of widows: thousands of them mere children, punished thus for some sin in a former birth by Gods, who—with the

magnificent injustice accredited to their kind—strike the sinner through her best beloved, for whom she is at least privileged to “win merit” through a life of service.

Strong in this belief, the orthodox Hindu widow “suffers her lot with the fierce enjoyment of martyrdom, and a very fanaticism of selflessness.” But zeal cannot lessen the evils of that lot; made harder since a humane Government abolished *suttee*, without perceiving that the spirit of it could never be abolished, while the sacrament of marriage means what it does to the Hindu wife. And who shall say, asks Miss Sorabji, but that the moral strength which this supreme sacrifice represented “did not make for something in the national consciousness? No one ever enforced widowhood. No one

enforced *suttee*: no one to-day can really restrain *suttee*." The wife who may not die with her lord "buys gifts" for him hereafter by self-devoted service to his family. "But in these days, and under the petty tyranny of a mother-in-law, the altruism of the little widow is worn threadbare." Nor is even she exempt from the all-prevasive spirit of doubt, which men and women of to-day draw in with the very air they breathe. Is her belief a reality? Is she in very deed buying gifts for her husband? "Admit the doubt,"—it is again Miss Sorabji who speaks,—"and you admit . . . discontent, consciousness of hardship, of ill-treatment. Yet all these tyrannies, this very doubt, has the march of time brought to the Hindu widow. There lies the tragedy. . . . She is losing faith in her own sacrifice

in her old attitude towards life : and therefore she has to be pitied indeed."

It is with these waifs and strays of humanity that industrial classes are mainly filled. The largest of them, carried on in a tall pile of buildings in the heart of Amritsur city, supports women of all castes and ages (united by the one common bond of loneliness and poverty), by means of purely indigenous industries — to wit, *phul-kari* work, cotton spinning, and the making of *nawar* or coarse webbing, used for bedsteads in place of laths. Here, working four hours a-day, pupils may earn two shillings to two and eightpence a-month : a poor-sounding pittance, but amply sufficient for their modest needs, and more than they could earn from non-Christian employers for the same amount of labour. The fact

that the mission superintendent is daily besieged by applicants, proves that the system adopted is just and reasonable, and meets, to the full, the necessities of the case.

Thus, here and there, by one means and another, efforts are being made to preserve and encourage an art that is twice blest, in that it blesses her who buys, and her who makes, with equal impartiality; and it is sincerely to be hoped that the Society for the Preservation of Indian Art may succeed in its praiseworthy endeavour to keep alive the true artist in these Eastern craftsmen and women who, from the remotest beginning of time, have been filled with "wisdom of heart to work all manner of work, in blue, and in purple, and in scarlet, and in fine linen."

PIONEER WOMEN OF INDIA

OUTLINE SKETCHES OF THEIR LIFE AND WORK

“Sympathise, be proud
Of their half-reasons, faint aspirations, dim
Struggles for truth, their poorest fallacies,
Their prejudice and fears and cares and doubts;
All with a touch of nobleness, despite
Their error; upward-tending all, though weak,
Like plants in mines that never see the sun,
But dream of him, and guess where he may be,
And do their best to climb and get to him.”

—BROWNING.

INTRODUCTION.

OF Indian women in general,—of their woes, their strivings and their fitful tentative movement towards progress, as we understand it,—an infinite deal has been written within the last twenty years. But of the few individual women who,—by such supreme efforts of will and intellect as an Englishwoman can hardly estimate,—have succeeded in emerging from the homogeneous mass, singularly little is known: and surely we of the West, whose watchword is Forward, should bestow more than a passing interest on the struggles and ultimate

achievements of these gentle yet indomitable heroines of modern India.

It is this same priceless gentleness, underlying always her power of brain and will, that constitutes the chief charm of the cultured Eastern woman. Lady Dufferin, writing on this, her favourite topic, asserts that it is impossible to read the life-history of any one of India's pioneers "without pride and pleasure in the fact that so much talent and persevering determination should be found combined with so many truly feminine qualities: for one might have feared that women who had had to break through the hard and fast rules of caste and custom, would have lost their more lovable characteristics in the struggle." Let our own pioneers consider these words. For of a truth, in these days

of independence, of pushing and striving among all ranks and sexes, the gracious old-world flower of gentleness runs risk of being trampled out of feminine character: the more so, because it is a common fallacy to confound gentleness with weakness; whereas true gentleness is the handmaid of strength though not of self-assertion. For strength has many forms of manifestation, and the ideal woman of the East is strong in self-repression, in cheerful subordination of the individual to the community: since an Indian household is still a community on the old patriarchal lines. She is the outcome of an ethical, if not a material, civilisation. Analysis of the seemingly arbitrary conventions that dominate her life reveals an underlying canon of stern self-control; just as analysis of

her rigid religious observances reveals a faith permeated with the poetry of symbolism.

Narrow her sphere may be : but within it her power is supreme ; a power that increases with the years, till, as Grand-mother—or Big Mother—ruler of many sons and of their wives, she is Queen indeed ! It is hers to make her kingdom—the Inside—a place of peace or of petty persecution : hers to be hoodwinked and dreaded as tyrant, or loved “as only those women are loved who have given, and given, and given, all their lives, seeking nothing in return.”

But the actual woman, in the East as in the West, too often falls far short of the high ideal set before her : too often, with increase of years, she becomes a shrill-tongued virago ; a tyrant, unassailable

in her own domain; yielding to none but the Holy Man—true lord of the Zenana—who wields his power to bless and curse like a two-edged sword. Cheap sensation - mongers, who prate of the scorned and ill-used Hindu wife, will find, in Mrs Penny's 'Inevitable Law,' a true and terrible picture of the scope and unscrupulousness of feminine tyranny behind the veil.

As for the rigidity of Purdah law,—which to the white woman seems a death in life,—the communal nature of the household affords ameliorations only known to the initiated. Miss Noble, who can speak from personal experience of the Hindu home, assures us that “if we live there day after day we shall find that every woman has familiar intercourse with some man or men in the

family. The relation between brothers and sisters-in-law is all gaiety and sweetness. Scarcely any children are so near to a woman as the sons of her husband's sisters . . . cousins also count as brothers and sisters. And from the fact that every woman has her rightful place in some family, it follows that there is more healthy human intercourse with men in almost every Hindu woman's life than in those of thousands of single women, living alone, or following professional careers in the suburbs of London or other Western cities."

Nor is the Hindu woman at all grateful for suggested innovations. "Did our great-grandmothers live otherwise?" is her unanswerable question: a question fatal to the spirit of progress.

Into this world of ancient and ordered

law stepped a brand - new civilisation, preaching the gospel of progress at any price, and aflame with zeal for uplifting the "downtrodden heathen woman," whether she would or no. The breeze of new movements stirred the dust of the ages; a paternal Government took active measures to promote the welfare of a people little understood; and even into the jealously - walled Zenanas the ubiquitous Englishwoman found her way. Surface impressions led to many false conclusions; the smiling reserve of the "downtrodden" ones held her at arm's length. But undaunted by obstacles and unmindful of her own ignorance, she devoted all her time and energy to dispelling theirs. The tale of her labours has already been told, inadequately enough; and these cameo pictures of India's pio-

neers in thought and action may be taken as proof that her seeds of enlightenment, if somewhat promiscuously scattered, did not all fall by the wayside or on stony ground. For the Oriental woman — obstinate and conservative as she is — rarely fails to respond when sympathetic understanding of her own prejudices and ideals goes hand in hand with zeal.

Witness the scene in Calcutta “when nearly eight hundred native ladies came together at Government House to present Lady Dufferin with an address signed by over four thousand women of Bengal, expressing their deep regret at her departure from India, where she had proved herself such a true friend to them, and their grateful appreciation of all she had done for them. Such a sight had never

been seen before, and it was one never to be forgotten. The great throne-room in Government House was filled from end to end with women of all ages, most of whom had never in their lives before been inside a European house, while many of them had never seen a European face; and to all it was strangely new and exciting to find themselves in a crowd. Only a small number of them could speak English, yet all showed themselves willing to converse by signs and smiles, where words were wanting. They were all overflowing with curiosity with regard to their new surroundings, as well as animated with real gratitude to the English lady, who, during her four short years of residence among them, had initiated and carried out a scheme fraught with so much benefit

to them and their children. Such a gathering as this must do a great deal towards the breaking down of the wall of seclusion and exclusiveness with which Indian women are surrounded; and there can be little doubt that more frequent opportunities of social intercourse with cultivated Englishwomen would prove most helpful to them."

The Parsees are living witnesses to the truth of this last statement. The bestowal of education upon women of the Purdah caste is, in truth, but the thin end of the wedge; a means to a larger end, an effort to implant in their hearts those stirrings of discontent which are the invariable forerunners of progress. Yet even in this aggressively enlightened twentieth century, which bids fair to be dominated by the woman militant, many

of the most advanced and cultivated ladies of India still cling tenaciously to the mystery and charm, to say nothing of the power, of the veil. Mrs Sarojini Naidu, herself a poetess of distinction and talent, holds very definite views on the subject. "The Eastern woman," she says, "has always been veiled; and Indian women will never really drop their Purdah. There will always be a veil between them and the world. I am not of those who desire to lift the Purdah before Indian women are ready to face man with a curtain woven of their innate modesty and reserve. I would like to see education given first behind the Purdah. Then, perhaps, the outer curtain might be gradually taken away."

And what of the form of education

that is to fit souls born to seclusion for the perils and privileges of the larger life? Margaret Noble's suggestion that it should be based on character, and on power to grasp with enthusiasm the ideas of nationality, and the individual's responsibility to the race, though somewhat large and vague, is sound at the core: and her further disquisition on it is worth quoting in full.

"How do we propose that Indian women shall grasp an idea of such vastness as this of nationality. How are they to acquire the knowledge necessary to define it? . . . In answer to such questions, we can only assure ourselves that when the world is ripe for an epochal idea, that idea pours itself in from all sides upon the waiting consciousness. The very stones speak it, and

the timbers of the wall cry out and answer them. Some immense struggle for the common good precipitates itself; idea and struggle act and react till the goal of both is finally achieved.

“This is the more true in these days of writing and telegraphy, of a common language and cheap print. . . . Wherever a word of English goes the national idea constitutes for itself the necessity of an apostolate. No one can say exactly how it will come to birth among the women. Some will catch it for themselves. Some will gather it from the men. Some are possessed of it already. But it is certain that woman, with her synthetic interests, will not long be balked of her right to consider things as a whole. The interest of the mother is ever with the future. Woman will

readily understand that a single generation of accomplished defeat is sufficient to divorce a whole race from its patrimony; and she will determine, and effectively determine, that the lot of her own sons shall be victory and not surrender."

But such a wholesale awakening still lies on the misty horizon-line of the future: and in the meantime it is interesting to consider the fate of the individual few, who, before the hour is ripe, have asserted in their own persons the woman's right to "grow to her full stature, taking as her due her share of God's light and air, of the gifts of the Earth Mother."

I.

THE INDIAN WOMAN AS POET.

To those acquainted with India's life and thought, it will not seem surprising that her first woman of note,—the first whose name and achievements reached even the Island dwellers across the mysterious "black water,"—should have been a poetess, not in her native tongue merely, but in our own. For India's religion, her philosophy, even her domestic rites and customs, are steeped in a symbolism that is the soul of poetry: and even the unlettered express life's commonplaces in similes, often of arresting truth and beauty.

It is conceivable that in the years to come India may give to the world women poets of true distinction and charm, such as indeed Toru Dutt herself might have been, but for her untimely death, at the age of one-and-twenty,—no less than thirty-one years ago.

But the tale of her life is a tale of promise half fulfilled : of a bud into whose deep heart the glory of noontide never shone. Her father, Govind Dutt, was a Bengali magistrate, a broad-minded man, of vigorous intellect, high character, and good birth. He was also a staunch Christian. Toru, the youngest of his three children, was born in 1856 at Calcutta, where she and her dearly-loved sister, Aru, enjoyed rare educational advantages. Their father himself took infinite pains with their first studies ; allowing

them, when older, to share the English lessons given to their brother, whose tutor, Babu Shib Chunder, first awakened in Toru's mind that love of English literature which was destined to produce such remarkable results. At thirteen both girls were deep in the delights of Milton's "Paradise Lost"; they knew pages of it by heart, and appreciated its wealth of imagery far more completely than do most English girls of seventeen. It was at this time that their father, a man far in advance of his time, decided on taking his two girls to Europe. Having lost his only son, all his hope and interest was centred in his daughters, whose talents he could not fail to recognise.

Curious to note that, in almost every case, the fathers of Indian girls encourage them in the pursuit of learning. Fresh

proof, this, if more were needed, that it is the women themselves—the mothers of the race—who have proved the most persistent stumbling-blocks in the path of progress.

Govind Dutt and his daughters went first to Naples, where the sisters studied French under good masters; then on, through Italy and Paris, to England. Here they stayed till the close of 1872, educating themselves perseveringly the while. During the whole of their stay in Europe, Toru Dutt kept a careful record of the impressions made upon her by the new ways of life with which she came into contact; and this journal, if now extant, should prove uncommonly interesting reading. Although the Dutts spent the greater part of their time in England, it was France that left the most vivid impression

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on the minds of both sisters. The contrast between her sinking magnificence when they passed through the land in 1869, with her sufferings and ultimate defeat in 1870, so deeply stirred Toru's imagination and sympathy that it inspired one of her most original poems. Two verses suffice to show how singularly well this child of fifteen had mastered the language and poetical forms of the West :—

“Not dead ! Oh no, she cannot be .

Only a swoon from loss of blood.

Levite England passes her by ;

Help, Samaritan ! None is nigh

Who will staunch the sanguine flood.

Range the brown hair, it blinds her eyes,

Dash cold water over her face ,

Drown'd in her blood, she makes no sign,

Give her a draught of generous wine ;

None heed, none near to do this grace.”

In 1873 the devoted trio returned to

Calcutta, where Toru, besides keeping up her French, applied herself diligently to Sanskrit,—her father helping her forward with unceasing encouragement and sympathy. The little household lived the same retired life as they had done before their eventful flitting; and the existence of these two uncommonly well-bred, well-read girls was not dreamed of by Englishwomen in Calcutta, many of whom would gladly have held out friendly hands to them, had they been aware of their presence. But in those days it was so rare a thing for an Indian woman to possess either desire or capacity to mingle in Anglo-Indian society, that it never occurred to any one that such phenomenal beings were living in their midst. Nay, more—when Toru's writings first attracted general notice, they were for some time

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accredited to some Anglo-Indian author, who had chosen for a freak to adopt an Oriental *nom de plume*.

Her literary *début* was made in the 'Bengal Magazine' with an essay on the poetry of Le Conte de Lisle. This was followed by occasional translations of French verse, and further literary essays, whose style and matter roused the curiosity and interest of all English readers who chanced upon the modest magazine.

It was at this time, 1874, that Toru's only sister died of consumption, a disease distressingly common among educated Indian women; and the sorrowing girl was left to work on without the stimulus of her unfailing love and sympathy. This she did with characteristic courage; and in 1876, one year before her death, she had the satisfaction of bringing out a small

volume of verse translated from the French. The modest booklet, badly printed, on poor paper, by a small native press, was in no way calculated to attract the English verse-reader, who expects to find his poetical gems enshrined in caskets matching, if not exceeding them, in excellence.

Happily, however, Toru's modest 'Sheafs Gleaned from French Fields' fell into the hands of more discerning critics;—M. Theuriot in France and Mr Edmund Gosse in England. The latter, in a short preface to one of Toru's books, thus describes the impression made upon him by her verses: "The shabby little book of some 200 pages seemed speedily destined to find its way into the waste-paper basket. I remember Mr Minto thrust it into my hands and said: 'There,

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see whether you can make anything out of that.' A hopeless volume it seemed, with its queer type, printed at the Saptahiksamabad press. But when at last I took it from my pocket, what was my surprise, and almost rapture, to open at such verses as these :—

“Still barred thy doors. The far east glows,
The morning wind blows fresh and free ;
Should not the hour that wakes the rose
Awaken also thee ?

‘All look for thee, love, light, and song ;
Light, in the sky deep red above ;
Song, in the lark of pinions strong ;
And in my heart true love.’ ”

This first book, though the least polished of her productions, is by no means the least interesting, abounding, as it does, in countless instances, of the power of genius to override all obstacles, though inevitably

baffled here and there by the mists of ignorance and inexperience. The complete adaptation of her mind to Western ideas is little short of marvellous; and when we remember that she wrote entirely in a foreign tongue, the grace and purity of her diction are as admirable as they are surprising.

In so brief a sketch it is impossible to attempt a complete criticism or appreciation of these, the first-fruits of India's poetic spirit; but those who are sufficiently interested in poetry, or the mental advance of Indian women, would do well to try and unearth the little volume and read its verses themselves. After Toru's death, a new edition was brought out in all the glory of good paper, print, and binding; it was further enhanced by a biographical note, and a frontispiece photo of the two

sisters. Her intimacy with all that is best in English and French literature was astounding, and it would be hard to understand how, in so few years, she contrived to find time for so wide a range of reading, did not life offer us daily proofs that time can always be found for that which we truly desire to do.

Very soon after the publication of her first book, Toru's health showed ominous signs of failing, and her anxious father persuaded her, against her will, to give up her Sanskrit studies, and take more rest. For a while she seemed the better for this wise precaution: but all too soon it became evident that the disease which had carried off her sister was fast sapping her own life and strength. The realisation that her time for work was to be ruthlessly curtailed, only increased the

feverish energy of Toru's mind, and the fixed determination to achieve some measure of literary success before death put an end to the labour she so loved. She begged and received permission to translate a book by Mdlle. Bader, called 'La Femme dans l'Inde Ancienne,' and, with the incurable hopefulness of doomed consumptives, cherished the belief that she would one day recover strength enough to accomplish this congenial task. But,—in the language of one of her own graceful poems—

“God had ordered otherwise,
And so she gently fell asleep ;
A creature of the starry skies,
Too lovely for the earth to keep.”

“Never,” wrote her lonely, grief-stricken father, “was there a truer, sweeter child.”

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When the first bitterness of his sorrow had passed, Govind Dutt found a mournful pleasure in looking through the mass of papers his daughter had left behind her, and in preparing some of them for the Press. Among other poems of varying merit he discovered seven ballads, based on Hindu legends and stories, and these he published, together with two translations from the Sanskrit.

Of even greater interest was the manuscript of a French novel, entitled 'Le Journal de Mdlle. D'Arvers.' Both sisters had been assiduous novel readers, and herein they gave proof of real discernment; for the best novels are true human histories, in essence, if not in fact.

Their pages abound in records of action and thought and character, such as can

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only be surpassed in interest by the actualities of life itself, actualities which these studious sisters, in their simple retired manner of living, were unlikely to experience in the flesh.

The singular choice of Toru's subject beset her path with difficulties innumerable. For how should the life, thoughts, and love experiences of a French girl be known to her, save by that mysterious intuition of imagination and sympathy which so often enables genius to achieve the impossible.

The conception is crude and full of improbabilities and mistakes : but it is full of imagination and knowledge of human nature, and reveals with striking vividness the pure spirituality of the authoress as reproduced in her heroine. The book

was carefully edited and prefaced by Mdlle. Bader, author of 'La Femme dans l'Inde Ancienne.'

An early death would seem to be the inevitable lot of the advanced guard of India's educated women, and the reason is not far to seek. The premature development of mind and body rests upon no solid foundation of physical strength, nor has the slow mysterious work of heredity as yet prepared their brains for the unwonted pressure forced upon them by schools and universities. Thus the fragile body is apt to wear out before the brain can reach the summit of its powers: while the danger of early death is increased by the necessary visits to Europe and America, whose damp, cold winters have robbed India of more than

one' promising young life ; none, perhaps, more promising than that of Toru Dutt, poetess of Bengal. Doubtless, in the years of spiritual ferment that lie between now and then, there have been other women of her race whose repressed hearts and brains have found solace in the divine music of words : some living and dying within blind walls ; some wearing the halo of local distinction ; and some, like Toru herself, seeking and finding recognition in that world of books across the "black water," where true talent rarely fails to come to its own.

Of these last, two at least have achieved notable distinction : Miss Cornelia Sorabji, whose prose is more instinct with the spirit of poetry than many a poet's verse ; and

Mrs Sarojini Naidu, the "porcelain poetess" of Hyderabad, who as a girl went to London; found herself speedily drawn into the world of letters; and there made many inspiring friendships that have remained unbroken since her return to India. She now lives in Hyderabad, the great Veiled City, where the women behind the Purdah are scholars in Persian and Arabic, besides being well read in the best literature of the East. Here Mrs Naidu holds a unique position, as a link between the English and Indian social elements. Her views on the lifting of the Purdah have already been quoted; and their value is enhanced by the fact that she is one of the few who has seen and known both sides of the veil, which she believes will always hang between Eastern women and

the outer world. Of herself and her own talent it has been said, that "no one could, if she would, speak more intimately and with greater authority on questions of feminine education and emancipation in India. But it must be remembered that she is a porcelain poetess. Into her art she introduces Brahminical instincts and antecedents. 'The best or nothing,' she says to herself. That she will one day enter the sanctuary of poetry is believable, since she has avoided the pitfalls of many minor poets—she has never been extreme or eccentric. She lives in a city where poetry is in the air, surrounded by love, beauty, and admiration; and her influence behind the Purdah is very great."

How far Mrs Naidu herself deserves

the title of poet may be gauged, in some measure, by her exquisite description of

NIGHTFALL IN THE CITY OF HYDERABAD.

“See how the speckled sky burns like a pigeon’s throat,
Jewelled with embers of opal and peridote.

See the white river that flashes and scintillates,
Curved like a tusk, from the mouth of the City gates.

Hark from the minaret how the *muezzin’s* call
Floats like a battle flag over the City wall.

From trellised balconies, languid and luminous,
Faces gleam, veiled in a splendour voluminous.

Leisurely elephants wind through the winding lanes,
Swinging their silver bells hung from their silver chains.

Round the high Char Minar sounds of gay cavalcades
Blend with the music of cymbals and serenades.

Over the City bridge Night comes majestic,
Borne like a queen to a sumptuous festival.”¹

¹ “The Golden Threshold.”

If Toru Dutt's delicate muse showed promise, here, surely, is something very near attainment. And when women of India can make such gracious music with words that are ours "by the right of birth," the women poets of England may well look to their laurels.

II.

THE PUNDITA RAMABAI SARASVATI.

IN Ramabai Sarasvati, we are confronted with one of the noblest, cleverest, and most devoted advocates of the enlightenment of India's women that the nineteenth century has produced: one of the first, also, who attained distinction through her efforts in behalf of those who are so little able or willing to help themselves. Her name is associated with an inspired attempt to found an educational home for high-caste Hindu widows; and though the home flourished for a few years only, its failure in no way detracts from the general suc-

cess of Ramabai's endeavours, or from the powerful influence which such valiant upward striving could not fail to exert upon all who came within its radius. Of her and her labours it may truly be said, "How far high failure overleaps the bounds of low successes!" The time was not ripe for the consummation of her great scheme, which will, in due time, be triumphantly resuscitated and carried through by one among our many modern reformists. Then will others reap the harvest that should have been hers, and few will be found to honour and remember the brave woman who sowed the seed and prepared the soil, which would not else have proved so fertile.

The life-story of Ramabai is a remarkable one, and, for that of an Eastern woman, singularly varied and eventful.

Both her parents were not only far in advance of their time, but had the courage of their opinions,—a rare trait in Orientals ; and a brief account of their unconventional life together is necessary to a clear understanding of Ramabai's own career and character. Their marriage was arranged and solemnized in orthodox Hindu fashion, during the inevitable yearly pilgrimage to a sacred shrine on the River Godavery, the little bride being at the time no more than nine years old. Then and there she was handed over to her husband, and returned with him to his distant home, never to see her parents or kinsfolk again.

By good fortune she found herself in kind, wise hands. Pundit Anunta Shastri was a man of high character and keen intellect ; nay, more, he was a believer in women, advocating their enlightenment and

the cultivation of their natural gifts. These heretical views he had tried to put into practice by educating his first young wife ; but his design had been nipped in the bud by an irate herd of female relations, the aristocrats of Indian domestic life.

In the case of little Lakshmibai, however, the Pundit resolved to stand his ground at all costs : in the teeth of indignant protest, he took her away into the heart of one of the great forests which clothe the Western Ghâts. Here, in a rude hut of mats and rough branches, the man and the child lived a life of complete isolation ; here they studied diligently together—loving master and eager pupil ; and here, after some years, children were born to them—one son and two daughters. Both husband and wife took part in the education of their children ; but the teaching of

Ramabai the youngest devolved chiefly on her mother, of whom, long years after, she said : " Her sweet influence and able instruction were the light and guide of my life."

Came a day when the happy forest home was broken up for ever by heavy debts, incurred through excess of hospitality to pilgrims and students, who came in increasing numbers to visit this unique household. The land was sold, and the destitute family driven forth upon a ceaseless pilgrimage from shrine to shrine, where the Brahman scraped together a scanty livelihood by means of learned discourses, such as pious Hindus delight to hear : till at last, after many years of wandering, blindness fell upon him, and he died. Nor did his faithful wife long survive him.

Thus, at sixteen, was Ramabai left alone in the care of her only brother, her elder

sister having died before her parents. At her own earnest request the Pundit had defied the dictates of creed and custom by allowing her to remain unwed; in addition to which she is said to have been stigmatised as "a prodigy of erudition." Certain it is that she had a thorough practical knowledge of Sanskrit, Maharati, Kanarese, Bengali, and Hindostani, besides being well versed in all the sacred books of Brahmanism and Hinduism.

She and her brother, preferring the old pilgrim life, made their way thus from one end of India to the other, advocating, everywhere and always, the mental enfranchisement of women. It was in Calcutta that the brilliant young lecturer tasted the first-fruits of fame. The wise men of the city, unable to believe the reports of her learning and eloquence, summoned her to

appear before them, and subjected her to a severe and searching examination, which she passed with high honours ; whereupon in recognition of her exceptional attainments, they bestowed on her the distinguished title of Sarasvati.

But even as fame and success seemed at last assured to her, a crushing personal sorrow dashed the cup of happiness from her lips. By the death of her dearly-loved brother the brave girl was left utterly alone in the world, unwed and unprotected—a unique position for a Hindu woman, who possesses no individual existence apart from that of the man to whom she belongs, whether husband, father, or brother. Happily for her, she was not left long desolate. Six months after her brother's death she consented to marry an educated Bengali of inferior caste to

her own; one who, like herself, had outgrown the beliefs and prejudices of Hinduism, without accepting Christianity in their stead—a common dilemma among enlightened Hindus, who drift thus into a vague, cloudy Theism, as unsatisfying as it is undefined.

The marriage was a happy one, and when a daughter was born to them they did not lament, in orthodox Hindu fashion, but rejoiced rather, and christened the child Manorama, “heart’s joy.” But mere happiness was not to be the portion of Ramabai. She was destined to achieve—and suffer. Her baby was still a mere infant when a sharp attack of cholera deprived her of her husband, and she was once again left desolate in an unfriendly and disapproving world. Not desolate only, but despicable in the eyes of all “right-minded” women;

for was she not, being a widow and sonless, a thing of ill-omen, a being doubly accursed? Nay, more, having presumed to marry a man of inferior caste, she was irrevocably cut off from all association with her own family and friends. But even in this, her day of utter loneliness, her brave spirit was not broken. She proudly refused the hospitality offered by one friendly kinswoman, and resorted once more to her former *rôle* of lecturer, urging now, more vehemently than ever, the mental and social emancipation of women.

Only in Bombay, among the people of her own race, did she meet with any real response to her appeal; and here she toiled the more unceasingly, journeying from city to city, stirring even the most timid and custom-bound hearts by the force of her earnest eloquence. In Poona she suc-

ceeded in founding a society for the promotion of women's education and the discouragement of child-marriage. Here also she pleaded for that medical aid to her Purdah sisters which has since been so adequately supplied.

But with the widening of her sphere of work and interest came a keen consciousness of her own limited knowledge. Her thoughts turned longingly towards England : and in 1883 she conquered her natural dread of the "black water." With her child, and one other brave spirit like herself, she took the momentous step of travelling westward—a step which proved an important turning-point in her career.

In England Ramabai was warmly welcomed by the Sisters of St Mary, who received her into their Home at Wantage ; and, by her own desire, taught

her the elements of the Christian faith. This was no unconsidered impulse, no fruit of missionary zeal. While she was quite young, Hinduism had lost its hold upon her inquiring mind; and for some time before leaving India she had been considering the possibility of accepting Christianity in its stead. Very carefully and thoroughly she had studied the entire Bible, first in Sanskrit, then in English; and four years of close reasoning and anxious thought had convinced her that here, indeed, was the one true revelation of the Great Unseen, the one perfect and acceptable form of religious faith.

In 1883, then, she and her little girl were baptised at Wantage. Here also she wrestled zealously with the intricacies of the English language; and had the ultimate good fortune to be appointed Pro-

fessor of Sanskrit at the Ladies' College, Cheltenham, where, in addition to her own work, she took up mathematics, English literature, and natural science, all of which she mastered very completely during her two years' stay.

At the end of that time she hoped to return to India, and apply for an educational appointment under Government. But an unexpected turn was given to her plans by a letter from America, begging her to be present in Philadelphia when her cousin, Anandabai Joshee, took her medical degree. It was this same cousin who, in the hour of her bitterest isolation, had offered to house and befriend her, and Ramabai was honestly glad to repay kindness for kindness, even though her American trip divorced her from her beloved studies before the

appointed time. She consoled herself with the prospect of returning in a few months at latest : and set out bravely and cheerfully on her westward journey.

But she was not proof against the subtle fascination which the new world exercises upon the oldest races.

America's thoughts and manners, and, above all, its advanced educational institutions, filled her with the keenest interest and admiration. The study of these last suggested to her resourceful mind a new means of helping her sister - women at home — namely, the introduction into Indian schools of Froebel's Kindergarten system. The charm and reasonableness of its methods captivated her : while the combination of hand and eye with brain-work seemed peculiarly suited to the needs of Indian women ; and she then and there

decided to make a comprehensive study of the system in all its branches.

With this end in view she joined a training-school for teachers, and spared no pains in devising how the various "gifts" and games might best be adapted to suit the children of India. When questioned by the inevitable interviewer as to why she devoted so much time to this particular branch of education, she said: "Because truth is the spirit of Froebel's teaching, and I think if the Kindergarten system were introduced into India, in secular and religious schools, it would give to the people not only an advanced mode of thinking, but would also dispel the illusions of many superstitious beliefs, and the wrong ideas that now keep women and children in subjection."

Her aim was to reach the mothers by awakening their interest in the moral and mental welfare of their children ; and she believed that Froebel's teaching would prove an effective means to this end. The excellence of English and American books made her realise keenly the disadvantages under which her own people would be condemned to work. But discouragement and despondency were words unknown in Ramabai's vocabulary. Obstacles only spurred her to more determined endeavour. She prepared a special set of primers in Maharathi, to be printed on her return to Bombay, and collected endless attractive illustrations for their adornment.

In 1887 her plans at last bore fruit. She had given up her first idea of founding schools and colleges for the higher

education of women, and had wisely decided to establish homes where well-born Hindu widows should, without loss of caste or faith, be trained in such work as might enable them to earn an independent and respectable livelihood, and to free themselves from the petty domestic tyranny of their husband's relatives. This she decided to do quite apart from all question of religion. She knew from personal experience that by aiming at conversion she would not only limit her scope and power, but would cut herself off from the very women who most needed her help :—from those countless sufferers who, unable to endure the hardness of their lot, would drown themselves in sacred rivers rather than renounce their cherished creed and caste.

This scheme was, of course, strenuously

opposed by Ramabai's missionary friends ; but, sincerely as she sympathised with the work of conversion, she had given this particular subject her closest consideration ; and she remained firm. Had she but continued to abide by her own wise judgment, that dismal word "failure" need never have been coupled with the dearest project of her life.

The money to open her first Home was collected from voluntary subscribers, and, in order to widen her circle of sympathisers, this indefatigable woman wrote a book on 'The High Caste Hindu Widow,' wherein she set forth, temperately and truthfully, the ways and woes of a Hindu woman's life ; a book as remarkable for its masterly style as for its matter. During her two years in America, she worked unceasingly for her

sisters in India: and by March 1889, had got together £4000 for the opening at Poona of her first school for widows, which she christened *Shardu Shan*—the Home of Learning.

It was terribly up-hill work, and for a long while the inmates of the Home were very few in number. But Ramabai's courage and perseverance was not one jot diminished: and at length it seemed as though she were destined to achieve a complete and lasting success. There can be little doubt that she would have done so, had not her chances been wrecked by the intervention of well-meaning but short-sighted missionary friends, who induced her at last to insist upon Christian teaching for her pupils.

From that moment the doom of her enterprise was sealed.

One by one the women fell away from her; nor could others be induced to come under her care; so that at length her Home of Learning, the outcome of her brave, unremitting toil, was left unto her desolate. It is probable that she bore this last and cruellest reverse with her wonted patience and fortitude: but she had neither the heart nor the means to start afresh.

If she still lives, one may safely add that she still works. But her little world has ceased to interest itself in her. According to its narrow estimate she is a failure: and the world has no respect for failure, however high. But the influence of a life outlives its tangible results: and, success or no success, Ramabai remains one of the few of whom it may be unreservedly said, "She hath done what she could."

III.

DR ANANDABAI JOSHEE.

IT was March, 1886, at the Philadelphia College of Medicine, that a gentle, delicate, unassuming Hindu woman of one-and-twenty, took the first medical degree ever accorded to one of her race and sex. It is difficult, in these days of the ubiquitous professional woman, Asian and European, to realise the full significance of such an event, at that time, to all concerned in the then budding woman question, which has since burst so profusely into blossom. Still more difficult is it for Western minds to grasp at all

adequately the courage, the steadfastness, the weary battle with opposing forces—social, physical, racial—which such an achievement involved.

But Dr Anandabai Joshee, like her great cousin Pundita Ramabai, was of those whose spirits are stimulated rather than daunted by opposition; and she, too, came of a race renowned for pluck, hardihood, and strength of character. The Mahrattas are born rulers; a dominant race. They inhabited originally the rugged highlands lying along the West Coast, below Bombay; and their men are cast in a stouter, sterner mould than those of the great Central Indian plains. Their women, also, having been allowed more freedom, and having been always held in high esteem, are remarkable for courage, perseverance, and mental vigour.

Anandabai Joshee was thus blessed with a priceless natural heritage; in addition to which, her father—a wealthy landowner of a town lying north of Bombay—was peculiarly devoted to the quick-witted, imaginative child. Girl though she was, he spent much time and pains on the congenial task of feeding and developing her eager little brain. By him she was eagerly led to perceive the absurd futility of mere idol worship, and to seek satisfaction in the higher forms of the Hindu religion. She was but five years old when she first seriously began her studies by learning Sanskrit, under the tuition of one Gopal Vinyak Joshee, a distant cousin, who, after the patriarchal habit of the East, had come to live with his relations near Poonah. Gopal was a young fellow of consequence ;

a clerk in the Government Post Office, and, withal, a man of education. For three years he taught his small cousin, Jamuna (Daughter of the Sun); and she on her side devoured the knowledge set before her as a starving man devours food. Her eager brain never wearied; her appetite for study never failed.

This pleasant state of things was rudely interrupted by a Government order transferring young Joshee to the Post Office at Alibag. His little pupil was beside herself with wrath and grief; the more so since her mother, a practical soul—who disapproved of the child's unwomanly propensities, and scorned the wisdom of books with the limitless scorn of the unlettered—considered that it was now high time to set about arranging

a suitable marriage for her daughter. Books or no books, married she must assuredly be; and marriage, she well knew, would put an end to the work which was the breath of life to her.

To Western minds it may appear scarcely credible that a child of eight years old should think and reason thus; but in the East women develop with astonishing rapidity: a girl of eight or nine years old being as advanced in mind and character as an average English girl of fifteen. So acute, at all events, was little Jamuna's distress at the new turn of events, that her kindly old grandmother took pity upon her, and astounded her family circle by announcing that she herself would go and live at Alibag, and would take the child with her. This was a daring social

departure indeed! But, by some means or other, obstacles, seemingly insurmountable, were swept aside, and the brave old woman had her will. It is probable that, before leaving home, Jamuna was formally betrothed to her tutor, which would have greatly simplified matters in the eyes of all right-minded Hindus. It is at least certain that in 1874, a year later, the marriage was celebrated with all due religious rites, and feastings, and illuminations.

According to Maharatta custom the bride changed her name on her wedding day. From thenceforth she was no longer Jamuna (Daughter of the Sun), but Anandabai (Joy of my Heart), a name not altogether devoid of meaning, for Gopal proved himself a devoted husband, and a ready helper in his wife's

schemes and ambitions, daring and unconventional though they were.

While in Bombay Anandabai attended a mission school, as the only available means of adding to her stock of knowledge. She always spoke lovingly of her teachers, but severely denounced the entire system of religious teaching adopted by Christians in India. Nor does she stand alone in her opinion on this head. The attitude of most missionaries towards their pupils savours too much of contempt on the one hand, and bigoted assertion on the other; a combination admirably calculated to defeat its own ends. Excess of conscientious zeal appears to blind these good people to the patent fact that compulsory study of the Bible, and wholesale denunciations of a creed whose deeper mysteries they have been at no pains to fathom,

cannot fail to rouse the indignation of a people who reverence, above all things, their ancestors and their ancestral faith. Thus it came about that Anandabai Joshee, after much silent endurance, left the Bombay Mission School in wrath and disgust: and, though in after life she met and appreciated many missionaries whose zeal was tempered with tact and discretion, the memory of her school experiences never quite faded from her mind.

In 1878 Anandabai's only child was born, to live for little more than a week: and the thirteen-year-old mother was heart-broken at her loss. A sharper pang was added to her grief by a haunting conviction that the precious little life might have been saved had proper medical advice been within her reach. This conviction so wrought in her mind as to influence

the whole of her after life. Like all great natures, she could find consolation in turning her own loss into another's gain : and thenceforward her whole heart was set on the idea of obtaining women doctors for Indian women.

She determined to set her timid countrywomen an active example by beginning the study of medicine without delay ; and her sorrowing husband made no attempt to oppose her daring plan. Both were convinced that America offered the best opportunities for medical education ; but there were countless difficulties to be faced and overcome before such a plan could be put into execution. In the meanwhile, the young couple were transferred from Bombay to Calcutta—as great a change of climate, race, language, and ideas as though one were transplanted from Glasgow to

Naples. The complete separation from their own people, and the enervating atmosphere of Calcutta city, tried them both severely ; but their souls were strong within them, and they set their faces steadfastly towards the achievement of their cherished project. It was carried out at length, chiefly by means of an unknown missionary correspondent in New Jersey, a Mrs Carpenter, whose interest in the young girl and her ambitions had been aroused by the letters that had passed between them.

In April 1883, then, all things were in readiness for her departure ; the necessary funds had been scraped together by means of subscriptions, and the selling of many of Anandabai's handsomest jewels. It was decided that her husband would help her most effectually by remaining in India,

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where he could earn money for her College expenses: and escorted by a small party of missionary friends, Anandabai Joshee sailed from Calcutta with an uplifted yet aching heart.

“I go as a Hindu,” she declared, on the eve of her departure, “and as a Hindu I will return, and dwell among my own people.” Which brave resolve she carried out to the letter; though it was to die among her own people, not to live among them, that she returned four years later.

After a short visit to England, she went on to America, and her kind unknown friend, Mrs Carpenter, took her to her own home in New Jersey. Anandabai at once entered on the four years' course at the Woman's Medical College, Philadelphia, and matriculated there in October of the same year. She flung herself into the

new work with characteristic ardour and steadfastness, often working fifteen or sixteen hours a-day. But her strenuous spirit was too vigorous for her fragile body. Such severe application in a trying climate undermined her health. Lung trouble set in, and persistent headache, which should have warned her that she was burning the oil of life too fast.

In 1885 her husband joined her; but his presence proved rather an embarrassment than a help. He seemed to have lost sympathy with her hopes and aims. He wrote slightly of woman and all her works; sceptically of her mental prowess; while readily accepting all he could get from his wife and her friends. In extenuation of his conduct it can only be said that the position was a new and unpleasant one for an Eastern husband,

whose wife—according to India's code—should have been incapable of living successfully and contentedly apart from himself: and for all his veneer of civilisation, young Joshee was still too innately a Hindu to relish the situation. But at least he had the grace to put no check on his wife's studies: and in March 1886 she reached the summit of ambition—a medical degree.

The young doctor's American friends were overjoyed; and it seemed as if a brilliant career now lay before her. But more than one generation must pass away before the undeveloped brains and bodies of India's women can safely be subjected to the ruthless strain put upon them by spirits athirst for knowledge: and, the long struggle ended, Anandabai's health showed symptoms of serious collapse.

She had accepted the post of resident physician to the female ward of a hospital at Kolapur, with leave to practise privately in spare time: but on the eve of departure the brave woman was prostrated by a severe illness that shattered all her hopes and endeavours at a blow. Consumption had laid hold of her, and her life could only be counted by months. She managed to reach Bombay, where, in spite of lost caste, she was received with all honour and respect. But Poona, the home of her childhood, was her final goal: and there, after long months of pain and weakness, surrounded by those she had so loved, her great spirit was freed at last from her tortured body, whose unspoken mandate, "So far and no farther," she had so heroically disregarded.

She was two-and-twenty when the end

came : but lives are measured by intensity rather than by duration : and, in the brief years allotted to her, this gentle delicate Hindu woman had accomplished much. She had sacrificed her life that others might be saved from the suffering brought about by ignorance and superstition ; she had opened up new possibilities for such as should have courage to follow in her steps : and the years that came after proved that the wine of her young life had not been quite fruitlessly outpoured.

IV.

THE MAHARANI OF KUCH BEHAR.

NOT until the Jubilee year of 1887 did the first Indian woman of royal rank venture to accompany her husband to England; and the name of that woman was Maharani Sunity Devi of Kuch Behar, one of the most ancient ruling families in Bengal. She was presented to our Queen at Buckingham Palace, and afterwards visited her at Windsor; nor were other Englishwomen of rank slow to follow their sovereign's lead and hold out welcoming hands to the courageous

little lady who — despite the opposing influences of creed and custom, despite her own instinctive shrinking from publicity — had dared to face the ordeal of social emancipation, and cross the dreaded “black water” with her husband.

Only those who are intimately acquainted with the lives and thoughts of Eastern women can gauge, even dimly, what it must have cost a woman of the Maharani's rank and temperament to act in direct opposition to public opinion, and to the most sacred traditions of the Maharajah's family. That she did so was due partly to her own good sense and courage, and partly to her early intimacy with many unconventional ideas and ways.

Her father, Babu Keshup Chunder Sen, was founder and leader of the remarkable Brahmo-Somaj movement, which had for

its objects the abolition of idolatry, superstition, and caste distinctions, and the restoration of Hinduism to its primitive state of pure monotheistic worship ;—a form of religious belief peculiarly acceptable to the ever-increasing body of thoughtful Hindus, whose faith in Brahmanism has been shattered before they are prepared to accept the teaching of Christ. Among the most imperative reforms urged by the founder of Brahmoism were the discouragement of polygamy, the education and enfranchisement of women, the overthrow of caste and of child-marriage ; and in 1872 Keshub Chunder actually induced the Indian Government to pass an Act legalising marriages between persons who did not belong to any of the recognised creeds of the country, provided the said persons had

attained the respective ages of eighteen and sixteen years, and were prepared to renounce the universal Hindu custom of polygamy.

This law was heartily welcomed by the disciples of the new creed. Great was their wrath and consternation, then, when, a few years later, their leader agreed to bestow his eldest daughter, aged fourteen, upon the sixteen-year-old Maharajah of Kuch Behar, whose long minority had given him the benefit of an English education, minus Christian teaching; and who, being then on the eve of his first visit to England, was urged by his guardians and relations to take a wife before leaving the country. Keshub Chunder's daughter was chosen, in the belief that both she and her father would exercise a valuable influence over the

young prince and his people—a hope that was but partially fulfilled. The Brahmoist, unable to resist the attraction of a royal husband for his child, gave his consent to the proposed match; whereby he lost not only the leadership of his party, but the respect and confidence of all his disciples; for the bride and bridegroom being under the age laid down in the marriage law of 1872, could not avail themselves of its privileges, and must needs be married in orthodox Hindu fashion, an act of retrogression which enraged all advocates of social reform.

In March, 1878, the royal wedding was celebrated with full Hindu rites, despite the protests of the bride's friends and relations, and shortly afterwards the Maharajah sailed for England, leaving his wife to complete her education under

her father's roof. On his return to India he claimed her, as he was entitled to do; and in 1883, having attained his majority, took the reins of government into his own hands.

For all his English education, and his ready adoption of Western dress, manners, and ideas, the Maharajah did not (as Keshub Chunder expected) desert Hinduism for Brahmoism. His family traditions were of the strictest, and his subjects were by no means prepared for so revolutionary a measure as the social enfranchisement of women. For some years, therefore, it seemed doubtful whether the shy, gentle Maharani, who was still little more than a child in years, would have courage to force her way through the obstructions that hemmed her in on all sides, or whether she would succumb to

the influences of the palace magnates, and end her days in seclusion, as thousands of right-minded women had done before her.

The critical moment came when the Maharajah proposed paying a second visit to England, and the important question arose as to whether or no his wife should accompany him. Betwixt the urgings and arguments of the conservative and reform parties, the poor girl's heart and brain must have been torn in two; but in the end courage conquered, and she went with her husband. Of her reception in England enough has been said to show that she reaped the reward of her brave decision, and on her return to India, some months later, there was no longer any question of her reverting to zenana life.

From that time onward she and her family have divided their days between Calcutta and Simla, in Anglo-Indian fashion, only spending a few months of each year at Kuch Behar, the capital of their small estate. The reception-rooms of their houses are furnished in approved English style; but the private rooms bear the characteristic Eastern stamp of extreme simplicity; and here the Maharani permits herself to retain many congenial Hindu customs, which she has nominally cast behind her for ever. Her children have English nurses and governesses, and she herself writes and speaks the language perfectly. Though not possessed of any striking talents or intellectual abilities, her quickness, her charm of manner, her tact and readiness to please, have gained her many friends

among Anglo - Indian women, and as hostess she is singularly successful.

But though her reception-rooms are thronged with English men and women, few Brahmoists, and fewer native gentlemen, honour her houses with their presence. Even in these days of advance, the majority of these last are still stoutly opposed to the Western custom of free intercourse between the sexes; so much so, that on more than one occasion, at the large official gatherings, prevalent in Calcutta, the Maharani was at first treated with marked incivility by her own countrymen. Small wonder, then, if she was chary about inviting them to her receptions.

Of late years, several Indian ladies of rank have followed the Maharani's example, and freed themselves from the

rigours of Purdah law. But among all forward movements this of social emancipation for women of caste must, in the nature of things, go forward least swiftly, and be constantly checked by unexpected reversions to the old order. The Maharani's own daughter is a case in point. Contrary to all expectations, she has married a Hindu of caste and has returned to Purdah life, probably at her own wish. For it is the women themselves who are most tenacious of the old order; and while they so remain, a daring example here and there will scarcely serve to leaven the whole lump.

V.

CORNELIA SORABJI.

A VERY special interest attaches to Cornelia Sorabji, the first law-student among the women of India—not merely by reason of her exceptional character and talents, but because she belongs by birth to one of India's most remarkable races. The Parsees, though aliens in the land, are by far the richest and most influential inhabitants of Bombay; and are seldom met with elsewhere. Their position in India may, not inaptly, be compared to that of the Jews in Europe. For centuries they have lived there as strangers

in a strange country ; keeping themselves rigidly distinct, in religion, dress, and social customs, from the natives of the land ; and very rarely intermarrying with them. Like the Jews, also, they possess a remarkable talent for business. They are merchants born, and are never found serving in the army. From their far-away Persian ancestors they derive their ready adaptability to foreign customs and ideas ; and without any loss of racial distinctions, they are the most completely Europeanised people of India. Like the Maharattas, they hold their women-folk in high esteem ; though in regard to religious conversion, they are as bigoted as any Hindu or Mahommedan ; and a Parsee convert must be prepared to face stoning, imprisonment, desertion—in short, the full rigour of national persecution.

Of these was Cornelia's father, the Rev. Sorabji Kharsadjee (a missionary in Poonah), who, while still a young man, openly confessed himself convinced of the truth of Christ. The usual storm of opposition burst in fury over his head;—without avail. His father and uncle disinherited him, and his mother died of a broken heart. But the young man held steadfastly to his new-found faith, and British justice was able, in some measure, to protect him from the tender mercies of his own people.

He eventually married a Hindu Christian convert,—a woman of rare intellectual power, force of character, and spiritual charm, who readily joined him in his labours. Five daughters and a son were born to them; but they were too genuinely enlightened to indulge in orthodox

lamentations. Nay, more, Mrs Sorabji rejoiced rather, in that she believed the regeneration of Indian society would be wrought mainly by its women.

She and her husband spared no pains in the task of educating their five daughters, the youngest of whom was Cornelia herself. Kindergarten ideas were then quite unknown in India; but Mrs Sorabji, out of the treasure-house of her inventive brain, must have evolved a kindergarten system of her own, for Cornelia describes their lessons in reading and writing as part of one long delightful game, which had no end. As her girls grew older, Mrs Sorabji's superabundant energy overflowed into wider channels. She determined to put into execution a long-cherished educational scheme:—a school for girls of all castes and denominations, to

be worked on the lines of an English high school.

"It seemed to my mother," wrote her daughter, "that the great question of how to bring the nations in India together could best be solved by making them learn together as children." A school on these lines had been successfully launched in 1872; and in 1875 its progress encouraged Mrs Sorabji to make her own venture. She thereupon founded in Poonah the Victoria High School, where Europeans, Parsees, Brahmins, Jews, and Mahommedans were successfully taught together.

Stimulated by success, Mrs Sorabji did not rest till she had established three other large schools; one of which made the training of teachers a speciality. A daring innovation! It was in carrying

out these far-reaching schemes, and in the successful working of her many schools, that Mrs Sorabji's flock of daughters repayed her fourfold for the pains she had taken with their early training; as do most children, if trained aright.

Cornelia being only nine years old when the Victoria High School was opened, took her place in it as a pupil. Three years later she began to help with the teaching, while keeping up her own studies; and at sixteen she matriculated at Bombay.

But Cornelia's ambitious spirit could not rest content with the passing of an examination; and she determined to continue her course, in the hope of taking a degree. She accordingly entered as a student at the Dekkan College, Poonah; and, while still living at home, drove to and fro daily to her work. It is hard for a modern

Englishwoman to realise how daringly unconventional were such proceedings on the part of an Indian girl; and Cornelia shared the fate of all who run counter to social decrees. She paid full tale for the gratification of her heart's desire.

What would you have? She found herself the only girl student amid three hundred men and boys, none of whom had been trained to treat women with respect, consideration, or courtesy; and with one consent they proceeded to make Miss Sorabji's college life as unpleasant for her as they knew how.

Cornelia was a girl of grit, or she would never have come among them; but she needed all the courage at her command to save her from ignominious retreat. Her fellow-students stared at her rudely and lengthily; played practical jokes on her

with merciless zest; and slammed the class-room door in her face, hoping to deter her from attending the lectures. But the hope was vain. She bore these studied insults with patience and even with good humour, being fully aware that, in the cause of her countrywomen's enlightenment, she must be prepared to endure much. She had counted the cost, and intended, at all hazards, to stand her ground.

In justice to her race it should be said that the Parsee students were uniformly courteous and respectful to her; and on the whole, Cornelia Sorabji enjoyed her college days. The small persecutions showered upon her could not spoil her enjoyment of the lectures and examinations, all of which she passed with honours, even unto the last, which carried with it

the coveted degree, and set her name—the name of the despised and superfluous girl-student—at the top of the Dekkan College list!

Great were the rejoicings when that list was published—not merely among her own folk, but among all genuine believers in the progress of India's women: and in honour of her success Cornelia was offered a teaching fellowship in the Gujerat College, Ahmedabad. This she refused—wishing to teach women rather than men. The offer was renewed, and when she found that a new fellowship had been created expressly to meet her demands, she could not well refuse again. She therefore accepted, consoling herself with the thought that “it would do Indian men good to be ruled for a time by a woman”; adding that “if ever Indian

women were to be raised in the eyes of men, it must be by respect gained for the whole sex by the bearing of certain members of it."

And one of those members she resolved to be.

This new departure was more formidable in every way than her earlier one at the Dekkan College, involving, as it did, a far greater degree of moral courage if it were to be successfully carried through. She had now to leave home altogether and appear before a large body of men, not as their fellow-student, but as their teacher. On arrival she was set to lecture a class of men on the language and literature of England; and, in a surprisingly short time, her quiet decision and ready tact translated their prejudice and scorn into open admiration and respect.

But Miss Sorabji, in common with all India's notable women, aspired to more than local triumphs. A visit to England and an English degree were the crowning points of her ambition, and with these in view she begged permission to enter for one of the scholarships established by the Indian Government in order to encourage students to complete their studies in England. But, despite her exceptional qualifications, she was told that these scholarships could only be held by men. This was a bitter disappointment; but she had no idea of allowing it to upset her darling project. With sixty pounds saved from her salary, and a like sum borrowed from friends, she was able to meet the expenses of her double voyage, in addition to which she had already been promised help in England; and, thus

equipped, she set out to discover what Fate and England held in store for her.

At her journey's end fresh disappointment greeted her. She found that the London University degree was the only one open to women, and that the necessary course was too expensive and too long for the means and time at her disposal. The course laid down for women by the Oxford University seemed, however, to offer certain advantages, and she determined to go in for it. In October 1888, therefore, she settled down to a fresh period of study. At first she gave up her time entirely to literature; but the opening of the Honorary School of Law to Women turned her thoughts in a new direction. It appeared to her that by qualifying in this particular subject she might be able

to strike out a fresh line of study, and to open out a new career for the women of India. Nor was she defrauded of her hope. The attainment of a legal degree—a triumph in itself—led eventually to the creation of an entirely new appointment, which she took up on her return to India. Here she established her headquarters at Calcutta, and began her life-work as Legal Adviser to Zenana ladies for the Indian Government. A new departure, truly, and one in which Miss Sorabji, with her man's brain and woman's heart, seems peculiarly fitted to take the lead. For the work she has undertaken demands a sympathy deep as the sea, and a courage high as the hills: courage to uphold the weak and unjustly oppressed, by acting in direct opposition to customs and traditions which, like all that obtain in India, have been

originated and enforced by priests, mainly for their own benefit.

In addition to her legal duties, Miss Sorabji acts as guardian to countless widows and orphans; holds herself ready to set out for any part of India at a few hours' notice, to hear complaints, and look into abuses; to protect old widows, frequently accused of madness, from the rapacity of relatives or the unscrupulous Holy Man; to shield orphan children, hedged in by those who would profit by their death. And go where she may, by the very nature of her errand, she carries her life in her hand.

Some day, no doubt, the world will hear more of her work,—pioneer work, indeed, of the first order: but for the present she is known to us mainly through two small books,—a volume of short stories depicting 'Love and Life behind the Purdah,'

and a collection of inimitable studies of Indian women, aptly christened 'Between the Twilights,' and dedicated to the Hour of Union. Her fashion of interpreting both title and dedication proves her poet and artist as well as lawyer. "In the Zenana," she tells us, "there are two twilights, 'when the Sun drops into the Sea,' and 'when he splashes up stars for spray' . . . the Union, that is, of Earth and Sun, and again of Light and Darkness. And the space between is the time of times in the sun-wearied plains in which I dwell. . . . The manner of its loitering is varied ; but always, always, it is an hour of enchantment, this hour Between the Twilights : and it is my very own. I choose it from out the day's full sheaf, and I sit with it in the Silences on my roof-tree."

But the title has its deeper meaning also.

For the writer sees the women of her race as beings that "float elusive in the half light between two civilisations; sad by reason of something lost, sad by reason of the more that may come to be rejected hereafter. . . . And none but God knoweth when will toll for them that final Hour of Union; and whether, when it is here, we shall be able to see the stars through the blue veil of the light that lies slain for all Eternity." Yes, without doubt, Miss Sorabji is a poet: a prose poet, it may be; but the spirit of the muse runs through all her work like a thread of gold; and these her exquisite studies,—etched with so sure and light a hand,—give us glimpses not into the life merely, but into the soul of the East. Her work has something of the quality of Japanese art; a drama, a poem suggested in half a dozen lines and curves:

and over all its tragedy and tenderness and deep humanity, her delicate humour scintillates softly like a star in the first grey of evening. If India is capable of producing many women of Miss Sorabji's quality, we may look for great developments in the years to come. Her four sisters have all distinguished themselves in professional life: and of Miss Sorabji herself,—as author, lawyer, and knight-errant to the desolate and oppressed—we shall assuredly know more hereafter.

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